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Some aspects of group decision making.

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SOME ASPECTS OF GROUP DECISION MAKING

submitted by P.G. Cumberlidge
for the degree of Ph.D
of the University of Bath
1982

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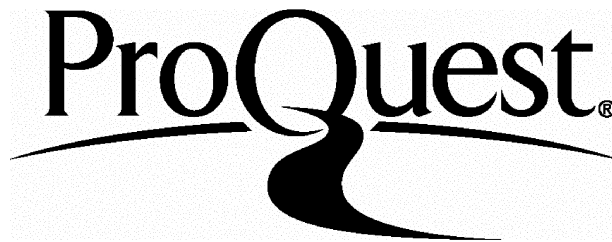
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ABSTRACT

We present the results of a research programme that examined certain aspects of group decision behaviour. Specifically, we have identified some dimensions of strategic and non-strategic interaction and considered the importance of both group and individual-oriented purpose as explanatory concepts.

The research indicates that certain 'political' models over-stress the importance of self-interest motives in organisational group decision-making and under-rate the importance of bureaucratic interpretations of purpose. The findings also show that much group decision-making is characterised by 'non-purpose', when the participants may be indifferent to the possible outcomes of the process.

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BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

* * *

The air was thickening in the elegant, oak-panelled committee room. I watched the trails of cigar smoke climb slowly and swirl among the crystals of the chandelier whose value could probably pay the salaries of the fifteen senior bankers disposed around the table for two or three months. The stern portraits of their forefathers gazed down with approval at the endeavours of those present if not at the elusive outcomes of the ponderous process of discussion.

The heavy damask curtains muffled the noise of the traffic below in Lombard Street. Even so, the droning voice of the Head of Property Division was scarcely distinguishable from the clatter of taxis backing and filling and the bustle of loading and unloading at Leadenhall Market just around the corner. On my immediate left, at the head of the table, the Director of Planning sat erect and attentive, a good chairman and an example to us all. His dark pin-striped suit was immaculately cut. The silk tie which bore the Bank crest was carefully knotted exactly in the centre of his starched white collar. To my right, the doodles of the Marketing Director had spilled across two-thirds

of his note-pad and I thought I could detect an ever-so-slightly pornographic theme.

I caught the gist of another sentence and carefully composed a minute note since it was some time since my last. In the distance I could hear the rattle of a tea trolley and wondered whether it was heading this way. When I looked up again, the Head of Property's lips had stopped moving and his gin-weathered visage was casting around for reactions. Attention turned towards the chairman and I noticed for the first time his glazed eyes and drooping lids. I tapped my pencil gently on the water carafe and he flickered back into life.

"Thank you very much, George, you've certainly given us something to chew on. There were two points that struck me as particularly vital to our brief ..."

He carried on with aplomb, and if it crossed anyone's mind that what he was saying didn't really seem to relate to those snippets of George's monologue that they had managed to decipher, they gave no visible recognition of the disparity.

I glanced at the clock. The hands seemed to have travelled backwards since the last time I looked, which must have been several hours ago ...

Such was one of my earlier experiences of the making of high policy, and it must be admitted that this kind of gathering has never since failed to fascinate.

This thesis is about committees and how they operate. The study described here involved following the work and progress of one particular Local Government executive committee for a period of just over a year. It aims to throw some light on that mysterious process by which decisions, action, recommendations, reports and sometimes new committees are somehow generated from long series of meetings, discussions, arguments, presentations and representations. We are, as a parallel interest of no lesser importance, concerned also with the theoretical and practical problems of conducting research into such institutions, and the many philosophical questions surrounding the elusive process by which a social researcher draws his conclusions from this kind of qualitative study.

1.1 Structure of the Research Programme

At the outset, it was decided to follow the work of an existing committee or working group over a significant period of time. One of the usual characteristics of these institutions is that they tend to meet relatively

infrequently. A long elapsed time is therefore necessary for the researcher to feel that he has obtained sufficient material. What constitutes sufficiency in this context is rather an arbitrary matter, but a point appears to be reached in one's association with such a group of people when there is no longer much surprise at what occurs in the course of the meetings. That is not by any means to say that at this stage the researcher has finally plumbed the depths of knowledge and discovered all there is to be found - that is often far from the case. It rather means that his acuity is probably beginning to dull from over-familiarity and possibly boredom and that is arguably as good a time as any to stop and take stock.

The Housing Assessment Team is a working committee comprising members from a number of departments within Bath City Council. The members are all professional local government officers. The Team was set up in 1975 by an active Chief Executive, and was given the job of managing the fate of the large number of marginal or non-habitable houses that then existed in and around the city. Much of this property stemmed from the Georgian period, some was built rather later. But it was the policy of the council at that time to increase the available housing stock - there was then a significant shortage - in line with the principles of

conservation that were, and still are, strongly held by the city.

Late in 1975, a housing survey was carried out, and this resulted in a list of properties which required work carried out on them before they could be deemed habitable. This list formed the subject matter for the Housing Assessment Team. Their job was to decide what was to be done with each property, whether it should be demolished or converted, how many housing units could best be made from each, who was to finance the work, and how the result was to fit in with the longer term plans for the area (e.g. in relation to any proposed road-building, changes in shopping facilities, green belt schemes, planned industrial development and so on). The work involved the team in deciding upon a suitable scheme between themselves and then consulting and negotiating with owners, tenants, nearby inhabitants, contractors, the planning committee and any other interested parties, in order to work out how the scheme could best be implemented. All this involved quite complicated and dynamic problems of choice.

The Housing Assessment Team was selected as a location for the fieldwork of this study for a number of reasons:

- (i) A multi-disciplinary committee was required, since one of the questions of interest of this study is the part played by members' perceptions of the objectives of such a team. We wanted to have a number of different institutional and individual views of these objectives and to find out something of how they interacted together. The Housing Assessment Team comprised local government officers from a number of different departments and so was ideally suited for this particular purpose.
- (ii) Two of the members of the team were already known to the University of Bath and were also accustomed to the presence of field workers. Since both they and the chairman of the team were willing to tolerate yet another inquiring force in their midst, the question of convenience came to the fore.
- (iii) The members of HAT are middle-ranking local government officers and are therefore close to both decision-making and policy-making within their own departments and also the execution of decisions and the implementation of policy. It was hoped therefore to tap the views of people who were neither too low in the organisation to be unaware of policy issues, nor so elevated

that they were far removed from the real and practical implications of the outcomes of the consultative process.

Stages of Involvement with HAT

There were a number of different stages of interaction with the members of the Housing Assessment Team:

- (a) Preliminary discussions with the head of department responsible for the operation of HAT, in order to obtain his agreement and backing for the research programme as a whole.
- (b) Discussions with the chairman of the team both to obtain his support for the venture, which was clearly of vital importance, and also to negotiate with him a role for me at the considerable number of meetings that I would be attending.
- (c) The early attendances at the meetings, at which I contributed little or nothing to the content of of the discussions.
- (d) Later attendances at the meetings, at which I was able to contribute something to the discussion in order both to pay my way for being there and also to maintain a natural and low-profile presence, which would have become increasingly difficult after a long period of non-contribution. A silent, lurking force can easily be tolerated for a while, but it will eventually cause suspicion and tension.

- (e) Discussions with individual members outside the formal meetings, in order to obtain their own views on particular questions of interest.

1.2 Outcomes of the Research Programme

There are two distinct kinds of output from this study, both of which are presented later in the form of commentary and discussion:

- (i) Conclusions and ideas about the social dynamics of committee meetings, formulated on the basis of both my association with HAT and also related experience of other committees.
- (ii) Conclusions and ideas about the process of undertaking this kind of qualitative research, particularly with respect to the question of how it is that conclusions themselves are drawn from the mass of diverse material (notes, minutes, tapes, interview data, impressions of how the members think and how they think other members think, off-the-record information acquired at the bar or over the lunch table) that one quickly accumulates in the course of the work.

To the extent to which this programme of research has been concerned to examine any one, particular hypothesis

it was that members of decision-making groups such as the Housing Assessment Team are not driven principally by the kinds of self-advancing motives highlighted by many of the contemporary 'political' analyses of organisations. Neither, indeed, are they always driven in any specific direction at all. We would rather incline to argue that 'traditional' bureaucratic interpretations of purpose are both pervasive and often strong but, at the same time, much of group decision-making, particularly at relatively low levels of an organisation hierarchy, is characterised by a general indifference to the outcomes of the process.

We shall examine these linked propositions with reference to a set of theme concepts, each important within themselves as models for understanding group decision, yet all related to each other as representing different facets of strategic and non-strategic behaviour.

We move on now to consider some important introductory themes that have informed the nature and direction of this research. The intention here is to set the scene both for the methodological discussion and for the later chapters of analysis.

1.3 Introductory Themes

An important idea that returns again and again in the later discussion is that what is often called the rhetoric of what is produced by committees in action

ought not to be dismissed merely as such, but should rather be considered and evaluated as real and principal output from the process. In a sense, perhaps, therein lies a major source of disappointment for those waiting and hoping for committees to 'produce the goods'.

Expectations are invariably based upon models of what individuals can and do produce when left to their own devices. Output from a group of people, however, is well-known to be of a qualitatively different kind.

It does not appear to be either meaningful or useful, theoretically or practically, to separate conceptually what should be "really going on" from the actual words and actions of the participants. Thus, we shall contend, whatever a committee finally produces is what it produces. What that is then labelled and how parts of it are packaged and distributed will depend largely upon the politics of the situation. But to be measuring that against a more "proper" form of output i.e. that which ought ideally to have been produced, is to misunderstand the whole process and its context.

In emphasising this conceptual standpoint, we shall highlight the existence of a series of different types of critical social state or period, at which points it appears that suitably formed rhetoric can become very powerful, when well-timed and apposite interjections can launch the proceedings onto a new course favoured

by the speaker. So that, regardless of both the formal and the informal power structure within the group, and the organisational pressures upon and ambitions of the members, it is often possible to over-ride the apparent "physics" of the situation with words designed carefully to manipulate the mood of the meeting.

At the same time, we are aware that such disturbances can be initiated quite unintentionally by the chance flow of discussion and may provide a kind of self-generated flux for the proceedings which intending manipulators have to learn to understand and take account of.

Values and Action

A central theme that will concern us is the nature of the relationship between dimensions of value and action. Each of the case studies in this thesis touches upon different aspects of "values", "objectives", "purpose", "interests", and we discuss what can be meant by these terms in different kinds of circumstances and how what people actually do seems to be affected by them. Models of behaviour which attempt to explain outcomes by reference to values are undoubtedly useful and informative, but they clearly need to be much more complex in conception than straight-forward matrix systems of cause and effect.

The centrality of values within an individual's intellectual frame, and their constancy in the face of the prospect of different kinds of action, are continuing issues of debate (Armstrong and Eden, 1978; Arrow, 1951; Becker and McClintock, 1967; Burnstein and Vinokur, 1973; Laszlo, 1973; Postman, Bruner and McGinnies, 1948; Rokeach, 1972, 1973; Vickers, 1972, 1973; Young, 1977). We shall incline to support the case for a rather contextual and contingent definition of values, which will always take account of the stimuli to which an individual needs to respond and the practical options for action or inaction open to him.

This discussion is complicated further when we come to talk and think about purposive groups as distinct from individuals. The concept of a group objective is highly elusive and time and again it has been found to be misleading to try and predict the "behaviour" of a working group simply with reference to some assumed corporate purpose (For example, Ackoff and Emery, 1972; Bales and Strodtbeck, 1951; Bennett, 1977(a), 1977(b); Black, 1948; Bonham, 1974; Bonham, Shapiro and Heradstveit, 1978; Curtis, 1974; Dando, 1976; Driver and Streufert, 1969; Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1959; Haworth, 1959; Janis, 1972; Johnson, 1968; Kuhlman and Marshello 1975a, 1975b; Lewin, 1952; Pettigrew, 1973; Sandberg, 1976; Simon, 1964; Vinokur, 1971). At the same time, in the present study, we

have found that individual members working within committees and teams are often aware of, and are able to articulate, some idea of a group objective, have referred to this notion in the course of discussions and even cited it in written matter such as reports and minutes. But whilst there is some evidence to support the existence of an individual's perception of group objectives, we would prefer to see this as standing as yet another item in the usually long list of conditions to be satisfied in the search for a workable solution to a problem, rather than as a central determining precept.

So group objectives appear to be neither entirely comprised of empty rhetoric, nor yet are they apparently pivotal to the behaviour of group members. The articulation of group objectives seems to be closely related to the individual's view of the group itself. Those who have a strong sense of group identity appear apt to operate with significant reference to a notion of group purpose. These notions can be, and in general appear to be, very different for each individual, regardless of any apparent similarity in the label which each may use. If such labels can first be identified, then clearly the understanding of each interpretation is vital to the understanding of the behaviour of the group as a whole.

It is in this context that such understanding is very often particularly difficult for those 'lay-men' who commission or set up working groups or committees with some apparently clear end product in mind. They may themselves have what they think is a well-formed view about the brief that they have laid down and are often frustrated that much discussion and debate, particularly in the early stages of the committee's life, tends to focus upon the interpretation, re-interpretation and sometimes re-formulation of the brief. Very often, the eventual starting point for the 'real work' of the committee is somewhere completely different than that envisaged by the party or parties who set the thing up in the first place. Sometimes that starting point is never reached and the final output of much deliberation is a new set of terms of reference. It is part of our point that this is rather a natural state of affairs and that those who would regard such behaviour as recalcitrant or inefficient are almost certainly doomed to suffer perpetual disappointment in the progress of such institutions.

Methods of Analysis

The discipline and methodology that has been employed in the course of this study has involved what might be called semi-participant observation of a particular working team over a considerable period of time. One

of the most important sources of data has been the individual discussions with each team member at his own office after the meetings. In this, we have essentially been following the thinking of Harré and Secord (1973):

"At the heart of the explanation of social behaviour is the identification of the meanings that underlie it. Part of the approach to discovering them involves the obtaining of accounts - the actor's own statements about why he performed the acts in question, what social meanings he gave to the actions of himself and others. These must be collected and analysed, often leading to the rules that underlie the behaviour."

People may account for their actions to make them intelligible or to justify them or both, but the relationship between what was done and what was said about that is liable to be complex and problematic. However, we would argue that just to watch is not enough. The 'pure' anthropological method of observation will tell you something, but it will not tell you very much at all about the systems of meaning that the members of a working team use in their interactions together. For that, the researcher has to try and make sense of what the participants tell him (and also what he thinks that they are not telling him). There are many traps of which he has to be wary

however, a few of which are now mentioned briefly by way of introduction.

Baffles to Understanding

There may commonly be a deliberate attempt by the person giving an account to convey an impression which is in some sense deliberately misleading, either to the researcher himself, who is the immediate recipient of the explanation, or, through him, to a third party. Researchers or consultants or anyone who tinkers with an organisation from the outside are prime targets to be used as unwitting couriers for internal political purposes.

At least as important is the phenomenon of what might be called 'inaccurate articulation'. An individual providing an account of events to a researcher may or may not be able to identify to his own satisfaction what he thinks were the important determinants of behaviour in a given situation, and he will then be more or less successful at putting these ideas into words. Thus, an individual may produce an account that he is not fully satisfied with, but may withhold his reservations from his audience.

Tidyness and aesthetics are important considerations in both the generation and understanding of explanations of behaviour. Getting behind the style may be

problematic. An individual may prefer a particular form of account e.g. structured or systematic, 'balanced', elegant, concise, poetic, or scientific. The style of rhetoric and metaphor employed by a local government officer will be different from that employed by a bank manager which will be different again from that favoured by an actor. It is also often very difficult to work out the extent to which an account is an attempt to 'repair' past chaos and provide a tidy explanation of what was essentially an untidy event.

The most common characteristic of an explanation of behaviour made to a third party is probably its function as a justification of a particular course of action. In trying to account for what Harré and Secord (op. cit) call the propriety of past actions, an actor will have in mind some criteria of rightness that he may hold himself, or at least believe that his audience holds. In trying to understand such an account, the researcher first has to recognise that justification is taking place and then to try and determine whose standards are being referenced. It is always very difficult for those being questioned from outside their organisation to accept that this third party may have no political axe to grind at all, save that of getting hold of some data that he can use. This fact can, equally, provide very informative interview material if the researcher is able to key into the

justification that is taking place.

It must in all this be appreciated that verbal explanations offered in response to a question will often carry their own momentum and will tend to exhibit a kind of inevitable indexicality. What is said next will in a sense have to follow on from and relate to what is said before. A slightly different starting point, a different question or shade of emphasis, a different response from the listener as the explanation proceeds, all these things have a bearing upon what is put out. Also, in constructing accounts, different degrees of knowledge and different interests are assumed for different audiences. Interpreting an account successfully involves being aware also of what was omitted. Explanations by social actors direct to researchers will be similarly constructed on the basis of what the latter is assumed to know and not to know.

Circourel (1973) has pointed to the problem of indefinite triangulation and the question of partiality. There is always something else that could be said. When is an account to be regarded as complete enough, either by the researcher or by the person constructing it? Of course the researcher, in constructing his own account of behaviour, has to address the issue of indefinite triangulation in much the same way as anyone else.

1.4 Presentation of Findings

We have chosen to develop the conclusions and ideas arising from this research within the format of five case studies. Each draws upon a particular sequence of meetings and the discussions that came out of them. Each is situated around a different theme, a theme initially suggested by the material of each case but then taken up and used to generate and focus discussion. The themes do not represent formal hypotheses in the experimental sense, nor do they represent conclusions within themselves. They are suggested determinants of committee 'behaviour'. The first is also something rather more than that since it considers the validity of a simple model of interaction between participants; namely, the notion of a Hypergame, developed by Bennett (1977a, 1977b) from the basic tenets of game theory. The remaining case themes are related to each other and to the concept of a Hypergame insofar as they each deal with different aspects of an important question posed by this thesis; that is, the relationship between a 'corporate' model of committees, a molecular view if you like, and a more atomic model which sees the output from committee discussion as the result of a complex network of interactions between the individually motivated members.

The case themes, that comprise the middle five chapters of this thesis, have been labelled as follows:

- A Hypergame Model
- A Collective Purpose Model
- A Leader-Driver Model
- A Personal Interest Model
- A Satisficing Model

The chapter on methodology that precedes these five comprises a series of arguments that attempts to both explain and justify the use of case studies and related commentaries to present and structure both source material and conclusions and ideas deriving from it. We discuss the extent to which these two forms of idea are in any case separable. The case study then emerges as a rather natural format of analysis, but one in which there is a continuing switching between different modes of discourse. We comment upon these modes and we also argue the case for a wider definition of what it means to be scientific when conducting this kind of inquiry. In this context, we consider the nature of the process by which 'findings' are generated.

Part of the point of this kind of line of argument is a plea for something of a 'liberalization' of academic studies such as we are engaged upon here. That is not to say that we are not fully supporting the application

of well-established and, in our view, valuable principles of scientific inquiry. It is rather that we do not agree firstly with the common contemporary restriction to certain methods of going about an investigation, particularly the literal interpretation of the stages of inquiry usually denoted by the 'classical' experimental method; nor, secondly, with an often corresponding naive view of measurement which either depends heavily upon the concept of quantity or else adopts a quantitative paradigm for handling non-quantitative ideas, often in both cases ignoring the rather tenuous and arbitrary nature of the links between observed phenomena and concepts that are formed to describe and explain them.

In standing by the apparent letter of the inquiry methods of the natural scientist, the latterly emerging social scientist often ties chains around himself, hampers both his thinking and the presentation of his ideas, and also loses credibility both with the natural scientists that he is trying to emulate and the population whose behaviour he is attempting to explain and who alone can arbitrate in the matter of the validity of certain of his conclusions.

Chapter 2, which looks at our own methodology and, in a sense, model of knowledge, now follows. Then we present the five central chapters of analysis. The

last two chapters draw the ends together, summarise the main conclusions that have been drawn and reflect upon the final nature of the product.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The research programme presented in this thesis had two principal objectives:

- (i) The first was to uncover some empirical determinants of group decision outcomes by analysing the work of a particular inter-departmental team in Local Government. The broad, guiding hypothesis of the research was that, for many examples of group decision-making, politically oriented models of behaviour which emphasize the self-interest motives of organisation members may tend to attribute strategic and competitive intentions where none exist. As a corollary to this proposition, we argue the extent of bureaucratic definitions of goals for both collectives and individuals. However, we also suggest that much of group decision-making is notable both for a lack of significant intention and an essential indifference to the eventual outcome.

It must be made clear that in no sense were we attempting to chart the 'physics' of any of the decision-making that has formed the material for this research. Rather, the object was to examine and elaborate a particular set of concepts that appear to be important for understanding group decision-making. The events of particular decisions have been illuminated by the application of these concepts.

(ii) The second object of the study was to make some practical and theoretical observations about how a research project such as this should best be conducted. Part of this purpose involves examining the relationship between source material and the things that a researcher then goes on to say about it. In this context, we look at some of the characteristics of 'scientific' inquiry and consider some of the ways in which it is similar to and differs from other forms of research. This is, in part, a justification of the method of presentation and analysis that has been used to serve our first objective, namely, the case study. This format has been employed both as a method of organising source material and as a means of structuring and explaining the conclusions that were drawn from it.

One of the conclusions of our arguments is that a researcher need not be over-preoccupied with method in order to be able to discover and pass on something useful to either a scientific or a lay audience. To argue this case has, rather paradoxically, involved a considerable emphasis upon method and some of the theoretical links between method and results. We look at the question of semantics in the process of drawing conclusions, examine the arbitrariness of these semantic ties and look at how the quality of

the researcher may often be more important for the validity of his conclusions than the discipline or methodology that he employs.

Data and Data Collection

What was to count as data for this study was not, perforce, fully known at the time of its commencement. It was, essentially, to comprise any stimulus, written, spoken, pictorial, symbolic, present or historic that could help to throw any light upon the progress of the discussions of the Housing Assessment Team.

The term 'data' is often used in a misleading way in accounts of social studies, and often rather strictly following its normal usage in the 'pure', experimental sciences. Somehow, 'data' might then seem to connote only minutiae observations of social phenomena that should be measured and recorded very precisely and then related in a logical and structured way to a set of conclusions or findings.

We shall not be so restrictive in the use of the term 'data', but will take it in general to mean any input to the cognitive processes of the researcher/analyst that may have a bearing upon his subject of the moment. We agree with Wootton (1975) who has observed:

"Much time is spent ... in discussing the ways in which what people say can be transformed into data, how the context in which a question is being asked influences a person's response, and so on. After some consideration of such issues, it soon becomes clear that handling responses and deciding on the status they can be assigned is no easy matter. In fact it is rather complex, and by complex I think we usually mean that there are problems such as deciding whether a particular response counts as an instance of some analytic category (the coding problem); deciding whether the way in which a response is classified does justice to the point of view being expressed in the original response; or deciding on the most reliable way of classifying responses. Such problems are mainly addressed in the context of survey enquiry, but they are in fact even more acute in naturalistic enquiry. In the latter case, for example, there is less chance of some standard response elicitation technique, and much interpretation will be based on the analyst's implicit classification of conversations going on around him. On the other hand, the participant observer is generally held to be in a position to pick up the meanings and nuances of what is going on around him, so that the looseness in the handling of data is compensated for by the greater validity."

The outputs from this process will be ideas and concepts

that help third parties to understand what is going on. We will argue later in this chapter that we can regard an inquiring process as being scientific to the extent that the researcher can identify the relationship between his inputs and his outputs.

The method that has been adopted in this study for collecting inputs has been based upon a principle of 'semi-participation' in the decision-making process being examined. My initial, and formally introduced, role with the Housing Assessment Team was one of academic researcher interested in the broad subject of decision-making. As soon as possible, however, I attempted to dilute that role both by a limited participation in the discussions themselves, where I was invited or where I thought that I could sensibly interject without giving offence, and also by demonstrating a willingness to talk with any of the team members about almost any subject at all outside the formal structure of the meetings.

The intention behind this degree of participation in the working day of the members was to try and ensure my unobtrusiveness, and also trustworthiness, by becoming something of a camelion and so blending in with the natural background. The consequences of not doing this are often over-rated and thought to be dire, but it is true that they can complicate the problems

of data interpretation. One is examining different social situations when a researcher is and when he is not present, but of course the latter case is rather difficult to arrange. Examining the reactions of a working team to having a researcher present would certainly be an interesting study, and it would be of some use no doubt to future researchers. However it was not our intention here and so we were keen to minimise those reactions in order to be looking at and thinking about a set of circumstances that could be deemed to be sufficiently like a 'normal' team meeting for useful and generally applicable conclusions to be drawn. We were hoping to obtain data that had just as much bearing upon our questions of interest as that which would be in principle 'available' when the researcher was not there.

Following Schwartz and Schwartz (1955) we would

"... define participant observation as a process in which the observer's presence in a social situation is maintained for the purpose of scientific investigation. The observer is in a face-to-face relationship with the observed, and, by participating with them in their natural life setting, he gathers data. Thus, the observer is part of the context being observed, and he both modifies and is influenced by this context. The role of participant-observer may be either formal or informal, concealed or revealed; the observer may spend a good

deal or very little time in the research situation; the participant-observer may be an integral part of the social situation or largely peripheral to it."

In our own case, the fact that research was the object of my presence was not concealed. My presence itself was formally endorsed and I tried to ensure that it was soon informally endorsed. I spent a considerable amount of time in the research setting and people soon got used to having me around.

Collecting Members' Accounts

The concept of an account has been treated formally by many sociologists and social psychologists. Broadly speaking, we may say that accounts are specific kinds of speech-acts that are provided by individuals when they attempt to interpret, explicate or justify other social acts (including other speech-acts) performed by other people or, more commonly, by themselves. Accounts essentially seek to make actions intelligible; that is, to invest them with socially sensible meanings and to locate them within a commonly understood framework. However, they may also attempt to make actions warrantable; that is, to display the rightness or propriety of what was done.

An important part of the present study was the collection of individual team members' own accounts

of events either at or seemingly relevant to the meetings. Data was amassed in the form of interview notes, most of which were set down immediately after such sessions. A tape recorder was used at some of these sessions and at the later HAT meetings. This is in line with our earlier stated policy of maintaining a low-profile, in order not to set up unintentionally special circumstances which would mean that we would be researching a different kind of social setting from that in which we were principally interested.

Our purpose in obtaining such accounts was to try and get at the meanings which the group members gave to the Housing Assessment Team, the work that it was given to do and their own and other members' contribution to that work. In this we are to some extent following the thinking of Harré (1979) who, as a psychologist, has been concerned to use account data to make statements about cognitive processes. He has stated:

"In account analysis we try to discover both the social force and explanatory content of the explanatory speech produced by social actors. This then serves as a guide to the structure of the cognitive resources required for the genesis of intelligible and warrantable social action by those actors."

Harre['] hypothesises the existence of what he calls 'template structures' which are created by individuals as representations of formal structures which are perceived to exist in the world at large. Accounts are not taken explicitly to reveal template structures; "... instead, the cognitive resources will show tacti representation of template structures."

Less relevant to our own purpose, Lyman and Scott (1970) have considered accounts in relation to the idea of the production and maintenance of smooth social interaction. Thus they define 'account' more particularly as "... a linguistic device employed whenever an action is subjected to valiative inquiry" that has the "... ability to shore up the timbers of fractured sociation ... to throw bridges between the promised and the performed ... to repair the broken and restore the estranged." Others have more simply sought to use accounts as we ourselves have, that is, as additional and complementary forms of data.

Clearly, it is not a straightforward business to interpret this kind of information. What people tell you in response to a particular question may be due to a great many complex and interlocking motives. Accounts may provide data not only about the specific social act to which they refer, but also about the wider intentions of the actor. A person constructing

an account will almost certainly have some kind of model of the expected consequences of the different things that he might say. In a sense, this model will serve to guide the production of an explanation. One of the questions that the researcher has to answer for himself here is the question of how he is viewed by the person that he is interviewing. It is true that some researchers in some sets of circumstances seem able to take on the role of detached confessional and the people to whom he is talking within the organization of interest fall over themselves to tell him the 'inside story' apparently without reserve. Most commonly, however, researchers are treated with great caution, not least because it is assumed that they will be getting about within the organisation and talking to a great many people. This can also mean that an investigator is likely to be used as a courier to pass on a political point to a third party or another department.

Even if there is no such manipulation going on, it is clear that the meaning of accounts is contextually determined. The person giving the account will probably assume a certain common stock of knowledge and will have his or her own ideas about the practical purpose for which the account is required. In this respect, not only the content but also the style of response will be adjusted in accordance with the respondent's view

of the sort of material the researcher would like to hear and his own preferences for providing such material. A given individual may lean towards a particular form having particular characteristics. It may be methodical, systematic, scientific and attach importance to detail and accuracy; it may be balanced and inconclusive, looking at all possible points of view and weighing them against each other; it may be anecdotal and graphic, stressing amusing incidents, 'hot' stories and political intrigue. Getting behind the style of accounts that are offered is vital to their interpretation. Material will tend to be selected for its suitability for the preferred medium, and important data that doesn't fit the form may be disregarded.

Particular forms of expression may also imply a structure to the data that wouldn't exist if the researcher had observed the events first-hand. Accounts very often succeed in tidying up the past, in making a series of fairly haphazard or chance occurrences appear to conform to an organised master plan.

Cicourel (1967) has made some important observations about the linked questions of indefinite triangulation and partiality in the construction of explanations of events. He has argued that fixing the point of closure is a rather arbitrary process and usually a

matter of judgment and expedience to suit the particular set of circumstances for which the explanation is required. A point may often be reached in the construction of an account when either constructor or audience or both sense that enough has been said (Ramos, 1978). What is said is subject to certain forces of internal determinism and will depend both on the starting point and the reactions of the questioner. Whether or not, for example, a response to the question 'why did you do this in those circumstances' is in some sense correct, it will represent one of a number of things that could have been said. If there is a reason that is somehow more important or central than others, it may or may not be given first. The first item in the response may be suggested by the form of the question or some other part of the context of the inquiry. Subsequent items may be suggested by the first. The initial question draws boundaries for the response, but so does any intermediate summing up, request for clarification or elaboration, or the feeding back of understanding so far.

As far back as 1947, Crawshaw-Williams observed:

"Once an opinion is formed, the strong temptation to hold on to it at all costs makes us forget how much we originally simplified the issue. The result is

that in making our selection from all the myriad facts which are presented to our attention day-by-day and which are nearly all of them evidence for or against some opinion of ours, we tend to ignore those which do not 'fit in'. If this happens in the case even of rational opinions, founded originally on some evidence, how much more must it happen in the case of opinions which were never anything more than comfortable distortions of reality. With such opinions there is a great increase both in temptation and also in the amount of evidence to be avoided. There seems to be practically no limit to the amount of evidence that a man can ignore when he feels sufficiently strongly disposed to do so."

The problem for a researcher of working out how much evidence his respondent has ignored is often considerable. Sometimes this selective perception is quite unconscious. Sometimes the respondent is deliberately intending to mislead.

Intentions to Mislead and 'Inaccurate' Articulation

This, perhaps the most common baffle to authentic interpretation of how people explain their actions, is also the most difficult to deal with. We have already noted the possibility of the researcher being employed as an unwitting courier of political impressions and it is as likely as not that this kind

of data misleads from what actually happened. In these circumstances it isn't even a sufficient solution for the researcher to somehow gain the trust of the person he is interviewing, even if he knew how to do it. If the researcher is perceived as an agent freely mobile between different departments or significant political actors, then even if he himself is trusted, the formation of useful impressions to be 'passed on' will be almost automatic for the respondent.

The researcher's best chance of combatting attempts to mislead probably lie with adopting some of the techniques favoured by interrogators! In particular, it is often useful to adopt a method of gently and casually probing around the subject of interest in the hope that any strategy to mislead is revealed by gradually emerging inconsistencies. What is especially difficult in this is to differentiate between such strategies and what might be called 'inaccurate articulation', where an individual asked to provide an account may not be able to work out fully himself what he thinks were the causes of the events in question and, even if he believes that he knows, he may not be completely successful in putting these ideas into words. Any doubts he then has about the authenticity of his account may be withheld from his audience.

Misleading accounts can also be quite unintentional in that they are an almost automatic bureaucratic response. Organisations very often have available routine, 'prepackaged' account formats for their members, as Lyman and Scott (op. cit.) have noted:

"Organisations systematically provide accounts for their members in a variety of situations. The rules of bureaucracy, for instance, make available accounts for actions taken toward clients - actions which, from the viewpoint of the client, are untoward."

So the researcher has to beware programmed and habitual responses to his inquiries. They can usually be identified from their unspontaneous nature and it is then necessary to probe behind the rhetoric to uncover the richer reasoning that may be there.

All of the interview material obtained in the course of the present study has been analysed and interpreted with these issues in mind. The intention throughout the whole process has been to get behind what people have actually said and find out something of what they meant, to try and uncover the webs of meaning and significance that are the real interactants in social groups such as committees.

We have then gone on to derive analytic concepts that

help to explain certain aspects of how events turned out as they did. This process was essentially one of almost continuous iteration, testing ideas against the data until some goodness of fit was achieved. We now go on to describe and discuss that process of analysis and to make some suggestions about its nature and limitations. We look at some theoretical ideas that bear upon the business of creative abstraction. The intention here is to provide a scientific underpinning for the case studies that later present the main findings from the empirical part of this inquiry. What we mean by 'scientific' in this context is also illuminated in the following section.

2.2 Making Sense of Data

2.2.1 The Derivation of Explanatory Concepts

A principal part of our interest in the process of conducting this kind of social research centres upon the theoretical foundation of any conclusions that we feel able to draw. Therefore, we shall in the course of this section be attempting to examine certain aspects of the means by which an investigator of social phenomena begins to make sense out of whatever he comes to regard as his data, the means by which he starts to try and explain the unexplained and to set up causal links between particular empirical observations.

The derivation of explanatory concepts is clearly not an activity that is confined to researchers, scientific or otherwise, nor indeed to any of those curious individuals engaged in pursuing lines of inquiry in a more or less disciplined manner. Some kind of explanatory structure will be created by anyone who is trying to understand anything, trying to make sense out of events that have confronted them. In the limit, it could be argued, all users of language can fall into this category, to the extent that language is seen as a tool to classify phenomena and delineate concepts which are then handled more or less discreetly and related to each other as and when necessary. But we shall be concerned principally with more conscious attempts to define concepts in relation to observed phenomena and in relation to other concepts - that is, with the process of model construction. Central in this debate will be the question of semantics and the nature of the relationship between a model and what it purports to represent. According to Harré, for example (1976):

"A model is a representative device. But it is unlike either of the two main traditional classes of sign. It is unlike a natural sign in that there is no causal relationship between a model and its subject, while a natural sign like smoke is related causally to the

fire that it signifies. It is unlike a conventional sign, since the choice of a particular model as a representation is not wholly arbitrary. The selection of a model is based upon real resemblances and differences between the model and what it represents, and decisions as to what are the proper degrees of likeness and unlikeness can be the subject of argument."

Mary Hesse has also pointed to this rather complex link between observation and explanation (Hesse, 1976):

"... the commonly accepted distinction between literal and metaphorical or analogical meanings is as baseless ... as is the distinction between theoretical and observation languages in science. All descriptive terminology is learned and subsequently used by a process of extension of application and meaning from similars to similars. I never re-apply the commonest term, such as 'green', in exactly the same circumstances in which I learned it, but always by making a (perhaps unconscious) judgement that this new situation is sufficiently similar to the old to merit application of the same universal term. My judgement is not arbitrary, since it is based on objective similarities which I am able to recognise, and is attested by the intersubjective understanding and general agreement of my language community."

There are two important points which emerge at an early stage in this discussion. The first is a very old question in the philosophy of science and yet very often remains an unaddressed issue in the evaluation of practical social research; it has to do with whether the researcher believes that he is in the business of 'discovery', that is of attempting to reveal what had previously lain dormant, just waiting to be found, or whether he sees himself as trying to overlay observations with some kind of explanatory template that he has designed specially for this purpose.

The second point, which in a sense follows on from the first, concerns the relative idiosyncrasy of research findings and the relationship between particular researchers and the things that they have to say about their own small corner of the empirical world. The social scientist would perhaps like to think that his findings are 'objective'. Conversely, much good and interesting social commentary is dismissed on the grounds that it is 'merely subjective'. To take this latter view surely reflects a naive interpretation of the linguistic basis of science. To take the former line may be all well and good, but social scientists often seem to operate with a rather restricted model of what objectivity is. Relativity is a concept that has been in circulation for a long time in the scientific community, but its full implications for

the process of model construction and explication are not always taken on board. For the purposes of the present study and the ideas that derive from it, we shall regard 'objectivity' as a valued ideal, but take it to mean a secondary use of language which attempts to explain, in its own or other terms, the relationship between ideas that are generated from the research process and the observed phenomena that start that process off. Objectivity represents here a dialogue between observation and explication. It means a continuing attempt to uncover and articulate not only the assumptions upon which particular models are based, but also the meanings behind the language which is used to develop ideas and generate explanations and explanatory concepts. Einstein (1954) made this point very clearly even in relation to the natural sciences:

"What science strives for is an utmost acuteness and clarity of concepts as regards their mutual relation and their correspondence to sensory data."

Objectivity in this sense has nothing to do with method, but is rather an expression of the basis upon which items of knowledge are founded and upon which they can then be used to reach into the unknown.

Putnam (1962) has made the following observations:

"We commonly use formalised objects to serve as models for unformalised objects. We talk about a game whose rules have never been written down in terms of a model of a game whose rules have been agreed upon and codified, and we talk about natural languages in terms of models of formal languages ... I think that we may say that the concept rule of language, as applied to natural language, is an "almost full-grown" theoretical concept. Linguists, sent out to describe a jungle language, describe the language on the model of a formal language. The elements of the model are the expressions and rules of a formal language, that is, a language whose rules are explicitly written down. The corresponding elements in the real world are the expressions of a natural language and certain of the dispositions of the users of that language. The model is not only a useful descriptive device but has genuinely explanatory power."

The phenomenon to which Putnam alludes takes its form in the course of this study as two levels of language use. The terminology of the two does not differ significantly, except in the occasional use and generation of technical terms to stand for phenomena or characteristics that have been identified or described in the language of observation and which are then discussed and related to others in the language of explication.

The use of case histories as a medium both of analysis and communication also involves this duality of language. Case histories first describe and then comment upon observed events, although the shift between these two modes is often not clean. The cases presented later in this thesis each have a theme associated with them. This theme is used to trigger and focus discussion and commentary around the described events, representing a kind of working hypothesis in each case. Such a theme is almost always necessary as a starting point to any discussion and we look now at some of the characteristics of how this process can unfold.

2.2.2 On the nature of Case Studies

Case studies can be viewed as amalgams of description and commentary and they provide a very natural way both of organising source material and of structuring its analysis. Popper (1957), evaluating historicism as a mode of inquiry, has made the following observations on the question of the standpoint taken by the would-be historian for the purposes of generating a commentary:

"... undoubtedly there can be no history without a point of view; like the natural sciences, history must be selective unless it is to be choked by a flood of poor and unrelated material. The attempt to follow

causal chains into the remote past would not help in the least, for every concrete effect with which we might start has a great number of partial causes; that is to say, initial conditions are very complex, and most of them have little interest for us.

The only way out of this difficulty is, I believe, consciously to introduce a preconceived selective point of view into one's history; that is, to write that history which interests us. This does not mean that we may twist the facts until they fit into a framework of preconceived ideas, or that we may neglect the facts that do not fit. On the contrary, all available evidence which has a bearing on our point of view should be considered carefully and objectively ... But it means that we need not worry about all those facts and aspects which have no bearing upon our point of view and which therefore do not interest us."

A number of interesting questions are suggested by this line of thought. First, what does it really mean consciously to introduce a preconceived selective point of view, what purpose does this actually serve and how is it possible to distinguish between the effects of this and any unconscious selective point of view that a writer of history may hold. Second, if we are not to twist the facts until they fit into a framework of preconceived ideas, what else can we do with them? Finally, how in any case do we discriminate

between those facts that have a bearing upon a selected point of view and those that do not?

On the first question, Popper's advocacy of the explicit use of initial reference concepts sounds rather like a parallel to the use of a hypothesis in the classical process of scientific inquiry. What is particularly interesting in both these cases is the relationship between the hypothesis and the material, the question and the observations. If you change the hypothesis, switch the question of interest, then you presumably glean something different from the material. This process could be repeated almost indefinitely for a case study. There is practically no limit to the things that could be said about it. A different area of concern suggests new forms of commentary and new explanatory concepts. But this is a creative process, there is nothing mechanistic or automatic about it. The quality of the commentary, both with respect to its relevance and its rightness, depends upon the mind that is making the links between question and material. Ask a different person and you will get a different answer. Ask the same person another time and he will make different links and they may be better and they may be worse, whatever we care to mean by that in the context of the case. As Grant (1970) has noted:

"... reality is not only located in the mind, but is at the mercy of the moods and caprices of that mind, dilates and contracts with the degree of activity of the consciousness. Reality is 'for the time being'."

What Popper's initial reference concepts are doing is to roughly delineate the area of discourse. It does not matter that the boundaries will seem to be blurred. In a sense, they cannot be otherwise and it is the continuing business of the commentary itself, with its self-conscious use of explanatory language, its 'objectivity' in our earlier sense, to clarify what is inside and what is outside. This is the process of explanation. It is true that the result is always subject to debate. What is important is to know what the result is.

On a straightforward linguistic plane, no coherent commentary could possibly be generated without the use of a question. Given a set of observed phenomena and half-an-hour to fill, a commentator would find it difficult to produce other than a sequence of more or less disconnected remarks and observations if he had no theme or slant to which to relate his thinking. He would almost certainly have one available, however, or dream one up in order to get going in a 'coherent' way. Language must respond to language, thinking proceeds indexically.

But to what extent is this process of generating explanations therefore rather circular? In this context, Kaplan (1964) has noted:

"... the behavioural scientist often makes use of what might be called the circle of interpretation: act meanings are inferred from actions and are then used in the explanation of the actions, or actions are construed from the acts and then used to explain the acts. Thus Collingwood (1946) has said about the historian that 'when he knows what happened he already knows why it happened' ..."

It is often difficult to distinguish between the process of appropriately associating new phenomena with existing, useful concepts and the process whereby the characteristics of existing concepts are searched for in a tangle of observed events. Kaplan goes on to say:

"After the moment of the observer's birth no observation can be undertaken in all innocence. We always know something already, and this knowledge is intimately involved in what we come to know next, whether by observation or in any other way. We see what we expect to see, what we believe we have every reason for seeing, and while this expectancy can make for observational error it is also responsible for

veridical perception ..."

Clearly, an important skill of the accomplished researcher is an ability to somehow be able to step outside the connotational constraints of his own and others' established language usage. In the process of trying to put together a plausible explanation of events and behaviour, he will attempt to be creative and to look at the possibilities for forging new connotational links. The search for such links underlies the very nature of inquiry.

It is interesting and instructive to view this search as a design activity in Churchman's (1971) sense:

"... design is thinking behaviour which conceptually selects among a set of alternatives in order to figure out which alternative leads to the desired goal or set of goals. In this regard, design is synonymous with planning, optimizing, and similar terms that connote the use of thought as a precursor to action directed at the attainment of goals."

Each time a researcher is confronted by 'data' and attempts to make some sense out of what he has seen, he undertakes a specific design task. It can be argued that he will be driven in this by two levels of goal: driven in a rather obvious way by the aim of trying to

produce an explanation at all, but more fundamentally by the objective of trying to construct a linguistic network of concepts and ideas whose meaning characteristics have a particular correspondence with the phenomena he has observed. This is his design problem. Of course it is not only the correspondence that is important. Just as an engineer might be attempting to design a car that has sparkling performance, moderate fuel consumption, and is comfortable, elegant and safe, so will the builder of explanatory models operate with a set of more or less conflicting criteria. His account will certainly have to 'fit the facts', but he may also want it to be 'scientific', persuasive, authoritative, coherent, interesting, brief, graphic, perhaps demonstrably useful for a particular purpose.

As we have argued earlier, if he is concerned with scientific explanations, the researcher's constructed linguistic network must not only achieve a correspondence with the characteristics of observed events, it must also explain and illuminate that correspondence itself. Thus, the reader of his account will be able to first test it against his own interpretation of events and then to examine how the researcher's interpretation is constructed. At least in principle he ought to be able to; yet it can be argued, conversely, that the problem of forcing someone else to accept

the connotational links that you have proposed between an observation and a linguistic explanation may be an uphill and sometimes impossible task. In Mary Hesse's earlier example, a person will only denote something as green if he or she recognises it as having the characteristics they recognise as greenness. If it doesn't seem to be green, then they will call it something else.

However, Michael Overington (1977) has commented that:

"Whether or not there is a relation between things, Burke argues that if there is a connotational relation between the terms which symbolize these things, then the embedment of such a connotational relation in the linguistic structures of human mental processes is sufficient to influence people to translate this symbolic relation into action (by providing a sufficient justification, by making sense for them of the projected action). For example, to call some occurrence of a death 'murder' is to justify (explain, motivate) the search for an individual who intended to kill."

So that if similar connotational relationships between the 'symbols' that constitute an explanatory structure exist for both the analyst who devised that structure and for his listener, then the listener

will at least be able to make sense of the explanation in its own terms, i.e. it will appear to have a consistency and a coherence and will not merely come over as gobbledegook. This coherence may of itself lend weight to the plausibility of the explanation.

Coherence is added to an account of observed events if there is an identifiable linking theme running through the argument. For the scientific reporter, such a theme often serves to close a circle of indexicality and to provide a linguistic starting point from which a network of cross-referenced meanings can grow. For the present study, we have selected particular linking themes after the main part of the research activity was completed, themes intended to guide and focus the analysis. Some would assert that it is not possible to even embark upon a programme of research without a well-formulated and particular quest, without a theory or a hypothesis to test. Kaplan (op. cit.) for example has said that:

"Every theory serves, in part, as a research directive; theory guides the collection of data and their subsequent analysis, by showing us beforehand where the data are to be fitted, and what we are to make of them when we get them. The word 'data' it cannot too often be emphasised, is an incomplete term, like 'later than';

there are only data for some hypothesis or other. Without a theory, however provisional or loosely formulated, there is only a miscellany of observations, having no significance either in themselves or moreover against the plenum of fact from which they have been arbitrarily or accidentally selected."

There is a counter point of view which asserts that by selecting particular observations after they have been 'collected' and by describing and arranging events in a particular way, the analyst can provide for his audience a good understanding of what he himself has seen and some insight into why things are as they are. Some sociological and anthropological commentaries are founded upon these precepts and are put together using, intentionally, a rather graphically descriptive style. Edgar Morin (1971), a sociologist, adopts this technique in his report on a three-year study of a village community in south-west Brittany, Plodemet:

"... the station square is half empty and barely used since the railroad was discontinued and the station demolished. A rather lifeless market is set up every month on the large rectangular site. The two hotels are located in this part of the town because of its proximity to the station that was. Both are rustic, despite the influx of visitors during the summer;

their restaurants refuse parties that are too large in summer and parties that are too small in winter ... The pork butcher makes his own pate and sells factory-made meat products, dairy produce and chickens. He has an electric spit, and in the last few years he has taken up preparing cooked dishes for the summer visitors. The electrician floods his planoply of gadgets with neon lighting - refrigerators, gas stoves, water-heaters, electric mixers (called anthropomorphically "Charlotte" and "Marie"), television sets, record players, records (Adamo, Johnny Halliday, Hugues Auffray in 1965)."

Images selected and strung together in prose, meaning deriving essentially from the selection, their juxtaposition and the style of description. The explanation is not explicit but it is nevertheless there. It becomes progressively clear as soon as you latch on to the fact that Morin's main focus of interest is the process of change wrought upon the village by the forward march of the economy. Appreciation of this theme throws the network of 'description' into perspective and images are then not only graphic in themselves but contribute points to a wider argument.

Morin's research techniques were not dissimilar from those used by most field investigators of social

behaviour. Morin notes:

"The inquiry, which lasted one year, was followed by a further period lasting eighteen months, in which thousands of notes, pages, and yards of recording tape were broken down and an attempt made to recreate, out of thousands of fragments, clues, and 'snapshots' a being which, unlike the paleontologist's dinosaur or the archaeologist's Troy, will never have any corporeal existence: a changing society. We had to compose and decompose, reconsider and reject, examine facts and ideas from a number of different points of view, meditate, reflect, in short think, in the preindustrial, precybernetic sense ..."

Morin is here referring himself to that creative process whereby ideas about data are somehow derived from thinking about it. By 'precybernetic' he seems to mean that the activity has no prior structured rules for arriving at the correspondence between data and ideas. However, he does make use of a reference concept - "a changing society." This is the theme that Morin uses to throw his material into perspective. This is the selected 'point-of-view' that Popper (op.cit.) deems necessary for generating a historical account.

What is curious is that Morin's account hardly seems

to depend upon a theoretical language, or indeed any formal or meta-language for its explanatory power. It is almost as though the explanation is self-explanatory. But it is not true that the commentary can be regarded as merely 'description', since there is a clearly emerging set of theories about the changing society. "An old community in a state of metamorphosis" is at once a prior suspicion, an early 'finding', a reference concept guiding the research as it continues, a grand conclusion and an organising force behind the narrative.

Medawar (1969) has reflected upon the efficacy of what are normally understood by the methods of science for this kind of investigation:

"I very much doubt whether a methodology based on the intellectual practices of physicists and biologists (supposing that method to be sound) would be of any great use to sociologists. On the contrary, the influence of inductivism ... has in the main been mischievous. It has stirred up in some sociologists the ambition to ascertain the laws of social change, above all by the painstaking accumulation of data out of which general principles will in due course take shape. The elevated prose and studied postures of a flourishing school of social anthropology in France today are best explained away as a reaction against

the crude scientism of those who have urged upon sociologists the adoption of a style of investigation which they do not use themselves and cannot authenticate from their own experience."

Medawar would prefer to separate the activities of sociology from those of natural science, a desire which has been expressed by many sociologists and physicists alike. Yet both groups are attempting some kind of inquiry and both would no doubt argue that they attempt to go about this business in a more or less disciplined way.

It seems important to draw some kind of distinction between the 'methodology' and 'intellectual practices' to which Medawar refers. Methodology is commonly used to denote the complete baggage of methods and techniques that a researcher brings to his work and uses to identify issues relevant to a particular quest, to collect data in a more or less systematic way, to keep a check on the quality of that data and then to draw considered conclusions about the quest on the basis of that evidence.

This kind of scheme for disciplined inquiry could apply in principle to natural scientist and sociologist alike. But there are some important operational differences and it is these, perhaps, to which Medawar was referring

as intellectual practices. In particular, the last two stages present significantly different problems for the sociologist than they do for the natural scientist.

Social phenomena are also fundamentally different from material phenomena, as Silverman (1970) has noted:

"Matter itself does not understand its own behaviour. It is literally meaningless until the scientist imposes his frame of reference upon it. There is no possibility of apprehending its subjective intentions and the logic of its behaviour may be understood solely by observation of the behaviour itself. The action of men, on the other hand, is meaningful to them. While the observer perceives water boiling when it has reached a certain temperature, men themselves define their situation and act in certain ways in order to attain certain ends. In doing so, they construct a social world."

The question of whether or not this difference in the nature of the material means that the essential process of gaining knowledge is different for social and natural science is more difficult to resolve. On the question of the validity of data, the natural scientist is very often concerned with the concept of contamination. He would prefer to think that the measurements he is taking are related to what he

thinks they ought to be and that the effects that he is observing or otherwise detecting are not partially determined by other variables of which he has no knowledge or over which he has no control. He therefore devises a system of cross-checks designed to reveal the presence of such rogues.

The social researcher is in a similar position if he has restricted his inquiry to a particular aspect of an observed phenomenon which, perforce, he is usually obliged to do. But his special difficulty is that the 'variables' with which he is dealing are not well-defined at the outset. This is partly because of the relative newness of the concepts he is using, partly because of the sheer complexity and relative indeterminacy of social phenomena, partly because the inquiry process itself merges with the situation being looked at and partly because he is less concerned with quantity and more concerned with quality. As a result, the social researcher often finds that he is in the business of helping to define variables rather than measuring them or devising a formal calculus that links them causally together.

However, this process of definition is open-ended.

The variables or concepts under construction can continue to grow in meaning as more and more data is brought into correspondence with them. The question

of validity becomes problematic since all data may be argued to be equally valid, or else none of it is.

To return to our outline of a process of inquiry, the stage of drawing conclusions can become the equivalent to the addition of meaning to an idea, the task of refining and helping to delineate a concept. Here we come up against a further complexity, surrounding the relationship between 'data' and 'concept'. This appears to be another dimension to the difference in intellectual practices to which Medawar refers. It is probably a difference in degree rather than of kind, since the natural scientist must also forge his own conceptual links between observation and finding. But he is often dealing with a relatively self-contained 'subject'. The sociologist usually feels himself to be dealing with the whole world, all that has gone on in it socially, all that is going on in it, all that people have said and thought about that and all that they are currently saying and thinking.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) have noted that:

"Generating a theory from data means that most hypotheses and concepts not only come from the data, but are systematically worked out in relation to the data during the course of the research. Generating a

theory involves a process of research. By contrast, the source of certain ideas, or even 'models', can come from sources other than the data."

How concepts and data might be related to each other they don't go on to say. Glaser and Strauss presume that in some sense theory that is derived from data is better than theory that isn't. This may often be so, but it is the degree of correspondence which finally exists between the data and the language of theory which is of ultimate importance. The problem is that this correspondence is difficult to measure, firmly lodged as it is upon linguistic foundations which provide the meaning for themselves as well as what is built upon them. In this context, Quine (1970) has talked about 'grades of theoreticity':

"The notion of a molecule or positron is more theoretical than that of a golf ball or rabbit. By this I mean that it is more remote from the data ... Preparatory to assessing grades of theoreticity, or distances from the data, we ought to settle what to count as data. They are supposed to be, as nearly as possible, the uninterpreted testimony of the senses. Thus it was that Berkeley and others have conceived of our visual data as two-dimensional and looked upon three-dimensional vision as the product of interpretation."

One of the primary concerns of the present research has been the interplay between two-dimensional and three-dimensional vision in this sense. Our intention has been to add meaning to a number of concepts that seem to be important for the understanding of some of the processes of group-decision making. This meaning is added in stages by a process of triangulation. The concepts that we have used have partly been suggested by an initial consideration of the 'data' in Glaser and Strauss's sense, partly from one's own past experience of decision-making behaviour in groups and partly from the literature. Whatever their precise origins, we proceed, by bringing data and concepts together, to make sense of the data and attempt to understand some of the determining forces behind the events that unfolded. By the same process, we aim to elaborate the meanings of the concepts both by relating them to data and, in certain cases, to each other.

The five central chapters of this thesis are each associated with a particular theme. This is the concept that we are researching in each case. They are, in order of treatment:

- The Hypergame
- Collective Purpose
- The Leader-Driver

- Personal Interest
- Satisficing

The Hypergame is a recent conceptual development in game theory (Bennett, 1977) and is a model of strategic interaction. It has some intuitively 'life-like' qualities that are missing from many game-based models. Specifically, it allows that the various participants in a strategic interaction have different perceptions of what everyone else is trying to achieve and how. Chapter 3 outlines the concept of a Hypergame, examines the constituent elements and shows how they relate to each other. We then consider the history of a particular case of the Housing Assessment Team in Hypergame terms, attempting to formulate certain aspects of it in strategic form. By this process we generate some possible interpretations of events, illuminate some of the things that happened and some of the things that were said. By the same token, we elaborate the meaning of the elements that comprise a Hypergame, adding perspective as they are brought close to the data.

Chapter 4 looks at some aspects of the concept of Collective Purpose, and develops this notion with reference to the same case that informs Chapter 3. We also triangulate this concept against the idea of Personal Interest. The two have been argued to

lie at opposite poles of a continuum (Zander, 1971) but we consider in this chapter, and in chapter 6 which deals particularly with Personal Interests, how the two phenomena were manifested in our own data.

Chapter 5 introduces the concept of the Leader-Driver in order to explain certain characteristics of those decision-making groups which are low both on Collective Purpose and Personal Interests. We consider how the apparent lack of direction in such cases can leave the way clear for determining forces which derive from the process of discussion and debate itself. The Leader-Driver in this sense refers to the mysterious direction that can suddenly appear almost from nowhere to push events towards a decision outcome when nobody seems to be pushing.

Chapter 6 examines some dimensions of Personal Interest that were revealed in the course of a particular Housing Assessment Case in which a public inquiry caused some of the team's reasoning to be externally evaluated. We look at some of the ways in which Personal Interests can be expressed within an organisational context and consider the scope for conflict with aspects of Collective Purpose.

Chapter 7 looks at the concept of satisficing, as developed by March and Simon (1963), and it considers

the events of another case in these terms. In particular, we see how satisficing behaviour can be associated with policies of 'laissez faire' and how a decision-making process that involves more than one person can be seen in terms of a sequence of more or less delayed responses to the actions or contributions of each of the parties.

Chapter 8 brings together important issues and conclusions about group-decision making that emerge from the previous chapters. Finally, in chapter 9, we reflect upon some of the strategies that were employed for collecting data in the course of this study and make some final comments upon the nature of the findings that were obtained and the way in which they have been presented.

Glaser and Strauss (op. cit.) have argued that:

"In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence; then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept. The evidence may not necessarily be accurate beyond a doubt ... but the concept is undoubtedly a relevant theoretical abstraction about what is going on in the area studied."

The categories represented by the five themes of the

centre chapters of this thesis were not generated purely from the data provided by the Housing Assessment Team. They were well developed already and much has been written about them. However, the cases selected for analysis against each of these theme concepts exhibited some indicators of the respective concepts and were therefore appropriate vehicles to be used for their illumination, whatever the degree of fit eventually turned out to be. It is part of our thesis that both data and explanatory concept will derive meaning from being brought together, even if the 'fit' is poor or even negative. Thus, the notion of Collective Purpose is lent a further dimension by considering the extent to which Personal Interest is related to it. Similarly, looking at what turns out to be an essentially non-strategic situation with reference to concepts of strategy adds further refinement to what we mean by strategy as an idea. It also uncovers a sense in which an interaction can be regarded as relating to this concept in a negative way, that is if it appears not to be characterised by strategy at all or only in part.

We gain further perspective by considering how the concepts relate to each other. The strategic structure suggested by a Hypergame has Personal Interest as a core component. But it is important to consider other ways of looking at interests and the notion of

Collective Purpose is an important example which is also related to Personal Interest as an idea. Strategic interaction implies the objective of optimising, but it is important to consider other standards of attainment and so we examine the concept of satisficing to add further perspective. Finally, if the element of strategy is weak and interests are not the major driving force in certain examples of group decision making, then it is important to consider other factors that might be important. Hence our concept of Leader-Driver is brought into play.

As a second objective of this research, we have been interested in reflecting upon the relationship between empirical observations and what can be said about them. This theme has been considered in this chapter and is also threaded through the rest of the thesis. Part of our method of presentation has been to juxtapose observation with 'three dimensional' interpretation. The reader is then able to draw some conclusions himself from the data and compare these with what we have inferred ourselves. He will not, of course, have access to the great quantity of background knowledge which has informed our own commentary.

To the extent that we have attempted to remain self-conscious about this process of analysis and tried to stay aware of what we appear to know about it and what

we do not, then this inquiry can be said to be scientific. We have suggested that one of the hallmarks of scientific inquiry is having available some considered basis for adjudging the status of the knowledge that is produced. We have argued that it is almost impossible for this adjudgment to take the form of measurement in the social research. The consumer of such research must, in the end, consider what is said in the light of his own experience, evaluate the epistemology that he believes the commentator to be using and evaluate its sensibility and utility accordingly.

In our search for an authentic understanding of the meanings that lay behind the events discussed in this thesis, we have attempted to get to know the main participants as well as possible. The fieldwork of this research covered a period of well over a year and many more conversations and discussions took place, particularly with the members of HAT, than could be alluded to here. We have attempted to include a sensible and representative selection of material, but it must be remembered that some of the conclusions that have been drawn will, perforce, have been partly informed by data of a rather elusive nature imbued, and sometimes imbibed, over a considerable period of time.

3 A HYPERGAME MODEL OF GROUP INTERACTION

3.1 Introduction

The Housing Assessment case presented in this chapter will be discussed and illuminated with reference to a recent development in game theory. Hypergame Analysis (Bennett, 1977a, 1977b; Bennett and Dando, 1977, 1979) is a method of game modelling which allows that the players have, in general, different perceptions of the game being played. It is an insightful way of looking at group interactions in which the members are assumed, in general, to be operating with incongruent motives and with more or less inaccurate ideas of the motives of everyone else.

We begin by describing the events of a particular case that appeared on the HAT agenda for several months. We then introduce the notion of the hypergame and discuss its relationship with and derivation from classical game theory. Finally we discuss the stages of a hypergame analysis with reference to the case itself and draw some conclusions about both the feasibility and the value of this kind of analysis.

3.2. A Summary Case History

The events which formed the subject-matter of this particular series of meetings centred around the

considerable debate and discussions over the future of the site and area surrounding a group of 'preserved' artisan cottages. These cottages were located next to an empty area of wasteground which had potential as both a building and a development site.

The cottages in question form a terrace of four and stand at the top of Bedford Street, just off the old London Road. They first appeared on the agenda of the Housing Assessment Team back in July 1978, having been found to fail to meet the minimum standards for occupation. Although the lower two cottages stand empty, two families live in the larger pair next to the London Road, which carries a large volume of traffic.

Bedford Street is a rather shabby cul-de-sac running south away from the old London Road and dropping steeply down towards the River Avon. The main road at that point contains a motley collection of shops interspersed with the occasional seedy looking office, usually with a blackened brass plate at the door and grey net curtains at the dusty windows. This whole area, just on the fringe of the city centre, had recently been designated by the Planning Department as being in need of 'tidying up'. Property prices and rates here are lower than they are a few hundred yards up the road.

Opposite and below the cottages, between the main road and the river, is an area of virtual wasteland which is currently being used as a free car park by shoppers and by the employees of a nearby bank. At the bottom of this site, which is about a hundred yards square, and down towards the river, an old brewery is now being used as a workshop for a small motor repair business. The mechanics also occupy a couple of semi-derelict corrugated iron sheds. Most of the land on which these buildings and the car park stand is owned by a Mr. H, who is also the proprietor of a nearby furniture store. Mr H, in conjunction with a local firm of property developers, B's Ltd., has recently submitted to the Planning Department a set of outline plans for the construction of 26 two-bedroomed flats, in blocks of three and four high. A number of different parties have an interest in this proposal as follows:

- (i) First, and forming the basis of our initial interest in the case, the Housing Assessment Team has its own official brief to try and devise a satisfactory and workable future for the cottages and their occupants. According to this brief, they will collectively attempt to weigh such considerations as the well-being of the occupants, the condition of the cottages, the short and longer term housing requirements of the city, the costs and benefits of conser-

vation, the industrial potential of the site and its prospects for providing employment, the long term plans of the council for the immediate surrounding area and so on. Their main official objective is the general improvement of the city housing stock and they consider other possible or proposed developments in relation to this primary purpose.

- (ii) The potential developers: Mr H who owns the land and B's Ltd. who would carry out the work. There is another possible developer who had once offered to buy the site from H and has twice submitted outline plans for a multi-storey car park. These have both been turned down and it doesn't look as though the scheme has much chance of getting started. The owners and some occupants of the London Road properties that overlook the Bedford Street site also have an interest in this case. They seem to be concerned that the views of the river presently enjoyed from their upper floors should not be obstructed by the new development. A few of them are insisting that if the proposed housing plan is approved, then three of the planned four storey blocks should be truncated to three storeys. This would reduce the number of housing units from 26 to 23 and the developers are arguing that this threatens the whole financial

viability of the scheme. They say that in this case, they would seriously consider reverting to an alternative, light industrial development for which outline planning permission has already been approved. This may be a piece of negotiating bluff against the Planners, who would prefer to see the housing rather than the industrial development on the Bedford Street site, although rough costings carried out by HAT seem to indicate that 23 units does indeed represent a rather marginal return on the project.

- (iii) The councillors who sit on the Planning Committee and the relevant Planning Sub-Committee are by no means in agreement themselves over what should be done. Most tend to support housing development in this part of the city rather than industrial development, but even some of these think that the proposed scheme detracts environmentally from the area. Others believe that the area has, in any case, no particularly significant image to detract from. One member is especially concerned about the height of the planned blocks of flats and the effect both aesthetically and upon the outlook enjoyed by existing neighbouring properties. Another is campaigning for a pair of old oak trees which would have to be cut down if the builders moved in. Another is worried

about the general question of over-development on the river bank and the risk of gradual degradation of this leisure amenity.

Perhaps rather paradoxically, none of those members of the council who specifically represent the ward in which Bedford Street lies, appear to be showing any great interest in any of these issues or discussions. None of them sits on the Planning Committee and none has made any representation to this committee or elsewhere. None of the ward members or any of the public has seemed to be concerned with the case, save for those few who have connections with the London Road properties that back onto the site and, of course, the two families who occupy the terrace cottages.

- (iv) The Planners have at least an official interest in this case. The terraced cottages which represent the core of the Housing Assessment Team's problem, are listed buildings. The planning representative on the team would himself prefer them to be maintained. He does concede, however, that there are plenty of similar buildings in and around Bath and the bit of heritage to which they contribute, whatever it represents, would not be greatly threatened by their removal. If

the Planning Department were able to come to a suitable arrangement with the contractors, then they would probably consider applying to the Department of the Environment for listed building consent to demolish the cottages. At the same time, a local conservation group is pressing for the preservation of both the cottages and the old brewery at the bottom of the site. Any of the proposed development plans would require this to be demolished.

- (v) The two families who currently occupy the pair of cottages nearest the main road would probably have continued to live there for a considerable time undisturbed, but for the fact that the properties came to the attention of the Housing Assessment Team through one of their preliminary surveys. Now that their future is under official discussion, someone will probably need to find some money to bring them back to the minimum standard for occupation. The families themselves will almost certainly be unable to raise the finance and the job will have to fall either to the City Council or to a private developer who would be prepared to take them on, perhaps in conjunction with a larger scheme.

This case, then, seems at first sight to be characterised by the relatively large set of interested parties involved and the extent to which there is an inherent conflict between certain of those interests. One of the secondary objects of the current research was to try to discover to what extent Bennett's Hypergame framework of analysis was useful in practice in understanding the dynamics of this kind of situation. We now introduce more formally the concept of a Hypergame, discuss some of its characteristics and look at how it is related to certain of the fundamental ideas in classical game theory.

3.3 The Hypergame as a Derivative of Classical Game Theory

We shall not be concerned here with the mathematical and logical foundations of game theory as they were originally set down and developed by Von Neumann and Morgenstern (1953). A whole algebra has been built upon these precepts and it is not part of our purpose to become entangled with it. We shall introduce the notion of a Hypergame as it was conceived and defined by Bennett (op. cit.) because this representation of situations of conflict intuitively appears to be able to attend to what Berresford and Dando (1978) have referred to as 'adequate conceptual complexity'. As Rapoport (1962) has noted of game theory itself:

"The value of game theory is not in the specific

solutions it offers in highly simplified and idealised situations, which may occur in formalised games but hardly ever do in real life. Rather, the prime value of the theory is that it lays bare the different kinds of reasoning that apply in different kinds of conflict."

Some important assumptions in 'classical' experimental gaming were those concerning:

- (a) The specificity of the situation being considered
and
- (b) the behaviour of the players in relation to the
laid-down rules of the game.

First, it was always assumed in the course of experiments that the possible outcomes of the game were well specified and that each player had a known and consistent pattern of preferences amongst them. It was also assumed that variables which controlled the possible outcomes were well specified in that one could precisely characterise all the variables and all the values that they could take. In short, it was held that one was dealing with games whose rules were well defined to all players. No possibility was allowed that different players had different ideas about how the game should be played.

Second, game theory traditionally made assumptions about the behaviour of players, in that they were

assumed to be 'rational', motivated precisely by their own utility functions which they understood precisely. Players were also assumed to fully appreciate their opponents' utility functions.

The rather arbitrary and simplistic nature of these assumptions was well appreciated by many of those researchers of strategy who were involved with using or developing game theory. Luce and Adams (1956) observed that:

"A basic assumption of the theory of games is that each player correctly perceives the payoff functions of the other players. This assumption seems highly unrealistic ..."

Nigel Howard, who has done much to extend the mathematical and representative sophistication of game models, comments (Howard, 1977):

"A game-theoretic model omits many factors (e.g. players' individual psychologies) that affect real-world outcomes. It investigates only the strategic factors."

The concept of conflict is fundamental to the basis of game-related models. Part of the authenticity of any particular model will clearly depend upon the

extent to which the explicit and implicit tenets of conflict are in fact reflected in practice. Vickers (1968) has argued that we may use the idea of conflict in two distinct senses. The first, which might be described as 'theoretical' conflict, relates to those situations in which the interests of particular individuals or groups can be demonstrated to be in some way incompatible, so that the fulfilment or partial fulfilment of one person's aims or objectives would mean the denial, to some degree, of those of another. It is perfectly conceivable in such instances that the individuals concerned may not perceive this tension of interests themselves. Whether they do or not, the conflict might be highlighted by an observer on the basis of some elicited statements about the parties' preferences, or inferred from their past or present behaviour.

Vickers' second sense of the word 'conflict' is commonly used to refer to a clearly observable state of animosity between particular individuals or groups. We might describe this as 'symptomatic' conflict. Symptomatic conflict can arise whether or not there is a real theoretical conflict of interests and can often confuse any analysis of the forces underlying the situation as it is observed. A gaming model that is fitted to empirical data is usually attempting to map the relationship between players' interests in a

simple way and, hence, to make explicit any theoretical conflict that may exist. The researcher who is using such a model to reflect the characteristics of his real-life setting is first faced with the problem of eliciting or deciding what those interests are. What the individuals may tell him or what he may see for himself can often be centred around symptomatic conflict, which may or may not represent the existence of a real disparity of interests.

The 'classical' theory includes mixed-motive games such as the Prisoner's Dilemma which account for the possibility of 'rational co-operation'; that is, the theoretical conflict between the players is not total. Both can benefit by co-operating to further the other's interests. When such games have been played in an experimental sense it has been observed that, notwithstanding the configuration of the game matrix, the extent to which players wholeheartedly pursue their own interests depends markedly upon the individual concerned, differences in personality and his perceptions of his opponent's intentions in this direction. Many results have been obtained which bear upon these findings (Slack and Cook, 1973; Hottes and Kahn, 1974; Kelley and Stahelski, 1970; Kuhlman and Marshello, 1975a, 1975b).

Trehune (1974) has carried out extensive experiments

with the Prisoner's Dilemma game and concluded that different personality subjects developed significantly different levels of conflict by the end of 150 trials of the game. He suggests that the main way in which personality governs conflict in Prisoner's Dilemma and similar games is not through a direct correlation of individual predispositions, but rather that the joint configuration of actor personalities predisposes the social system to develop characteristic forms of behaviour during extended interaction among its actor-components. The 'group' of players seems to build up predictable patterns of responses which can be seen to relate to that group alone.

Sermat (1967) has carried out experiments in which the behaviour of players, in terms of their disposition towards conflict or co-operation, has been modified by feeding back information about opponents' strategies. More recently, Dando and Bee (1977) have investigated the effect of players having different aims in game experiments, concluding that:

"... the experimenter cannot assume that his view of the situation corresponds with that of the players. In particular, he cannot assume that the players will necessarily adopt his specification of the aim of the game."

Dando and Bee characterised three types of player in the course of their experiments. These were: own gain maximisers, joint gain maximisers and relative gain maximisers. These types effectively represented three different interpretations of the stated aims of the game. Clearly, the competitive spirit assumed to exist in game participants is not always central to their behaviour.

In a preliminary Hypergame Analysis of the fall of France to Germany in 1940, Bennett and Dando (1977) noted that:

"... one of the most important factors in this case was the difference between the opposing High Commands' perceptions as to what were the strategic possibilities. Their choices were based on arguments that apply to different games. The assumption of players' 'complete' information is clearly violated in this case - and, it can be argued, is violated in most interesting real-world conflicts. We cannot give a satisfactory account in terms of a single 'objective' or 'inter-subjective' game, or meta-games based on such a common game. Nor is the problem one of decision-making under uncertainty, in the sense of the participants being aware that their information was incomplete."

A hypergame is essentially viewed as a game in which

the players are assumed, in general, to be playing according to different sets of rules. Each player has his own set of strategies, his own perceptions of the possible outcomes and his own system of preferences relating to those outcomes. He may also, though not necessarily, attribute different possible strategies, perceived outcomes and preferences to each of his opponents.

According to Bennett (1977), a hypergame

"... is a system comprised of a set of games, each game being interpreted as expressing a particular player's perception of the situation. Players' actions are not analysed as moves in some objectively-given game, but as simultaneous moves in this linked set of perceptual games."

The possibility exists, then, for a player to be subject to strategic surprise, in cases where an opponent had more strategies than he had perceived. Therefore, a completely unforeseen result could be obtained.

More formally, Bennett offers the following definition:

"An n-person hypergame in normal form is a system consisting of the following:

- H1 : a set P_n , of n elements
 H2 : for each $p, q \in P_n$, a non-empty finite set S_p^q
 H3 : for each $p, q \in P_n$, an ordering relationship O_p^q
 defined over the product space $S_1^q \times \dots \times S_n^q$

The elements of P_n are interpreted as the players of the hypergame. S_p^q and O_p^q are interpreted respectively as the set of strategies for player p , and p 's preference ordering, as perceived by q . That is, they express q 's perception of p 's options and aims. Just as an n -person game can be represented using an n -dimensional matrix, so an n -person hypergame can be pictured in the form of n n -dimensional matrices. The sets S_1^q, \dots, S_n^q make up q 's strategy matrix. Together with P_n and the orderings O_1^q, \dots, O_n^q they will be said to comprise player q 's game within the hypergame. The hypergame can thus be considered as a set of n games, one for each player."

Although we shall intentionally not be concerned here with any of the mathematical analyses that can be carried out with game matrices, we have included this formal definition of a hypergame to help ensure complete clarity of the concept. Experience has shown (Dando and Sharp, 1977; Wilcox, 1972; Noton, Mitchell and Janes, 1974; Bennett and Dando, 1979; Bennett, 1977a, 1977b) that by far the greatest value to be obtained from this kind of structural analysis derives

from the analyst appreciating the structure that is proposed and then considering collections of observed events in the light of that structure. Game matrix analysis is almost prohibitively complex once one moves beyond the simple two player system with a very limited number of strategies. Even Bennett has not been able to make much mathematical sense out of any other than two player hypergames. Programming any such processing, even if a satisfactory algorithm could be agreed, would in any case be a question of producing multitudinous incomprehensible variations upon a rather simple theme.

The prime value of a hypergame analysis rests with its ability to give the researcher a much greater range of concept possibilities than he would otherwise have had. Once he has appreciated the ideas proposed in the model, then the nature of his thinking about the relation between what he observes and how he makes sense of that is significantly changed. He is then on the look out for diverse perceptions of the situation by the 'players', which could perhaps help to explain otherwise puzzling or 'illogical' outcomes. He has at his disposal an improved stock of conceptual categories for so doing. We move on now to consider the present case in these hypergaming terms.

3.4 Phases of a Hypergame Analysis

3.4.1 Seeing the Hypergame

The process of attempting to understand some of the forces and motives that may have contributed to an observed chain of events is necessarily rooted in the past experience of the individual concerned.

Dilthey (1961) has observed that:

"Understanding rests on what we might call an inside view of human nature which we all possess. We are certainly not all psychologically sophisticated; we have not analysed ourselves and traced our motives. Indeed, where we think that we know our motives we often delude ourselves; a spectator may understand them better. Thus we have no privileged psychological knowledge. Indeed, we are not talking about psychological knowledge but about something much more simple and fundamental. We know what it is like to be angry or happy, to remember or to make an effort towards a goal. We also experience certain connections in our mental life directly, how a memory may produce grief or desire and how such desire may prompt us to action.

... The employment of these basic insights allows us to understand other people. Such understanding is neither mysterious nor infallible. It can be described

as based on a kind of analogical argument."

Attempting to analyse the events of a case history with reference to a particular set of related ideas involves this kind of process, and this is partly what we mean by 'seeing the hypergame'. We take as a starting point some of the things that were said about the Bedford Street housing case by some of the would-be players.

R is the co-ordinator and chairman of the Housing Assessment Team and he had this to say when I asked him about the kinds of consideration that he bore in mind when trying to work out the best outcomes of housing cases in general and the Bedford Street case in particular:

"That's difficult to say. It's basically a question of compromising between all kinds of different interests. As far as HAT is concerned, some people on the Council and in this department see us as just a group of public health inspectors dabbling in housing. But we try to look at problems with a wider brief than that. The Bedford Street story is a good case in point. I mean, as you know, we have been following the planning proposals right from the beginning and trying to work out our own ideas around them. The whole area there has to be

considered in its entirety, as with all planning really, otherwise you get a hotch-potch of developments with everyone doing their own thing."

I then asked R to what extent he thought that the participants in a case such as Bedford Street had important personal interests that they would always seek to pursue regardless of anyone who was trying to mediate in the interests of compromise.

"Everyone has their own hobby-horse of course, particularly the councillors. Party politics often comes into it, and personalities too. I mean B (a labour councillor) will almost always argue with anything that G (a woman conservative councillor) has to say. And H (a Head of Department) is very political with a small p. He is always pushing his department in some way, always keen to expand its area of influence. I suppose we're the same in a way. Nobody likes to appear incompetent do they, so we always try to make a professional job of our reports and we always try to come down on one side or the other and make positive recommendations to the committee. Housing Assessment is a comparatively new idea as you know, and there are still a number of people, particularly around the departments, who think that it is all a lot of fuss over nothing. So naturally I look to my own interests in that way.

Housing Assessment is now the biggest part of my job after all."

It is interesting to note from these comments that R, although he clearly recognises that individuals involved in a particular case will each have their own interests to serve (and he doesn't exclude himself from this) he at the same time seems to maintain the notion that at the middle of it all there is some universally recognisable and common problem to be solved and that, to a large extent, the people concerned will usually work together, or at least try to appear to work together, in trying to thrash it out. Evidence from other participants in this case suggests that this perspective is commonly held. Individuals that we spoke to were each

- prepared to give and take in the course of both formal and informal discussions, on a kind of direct transactional basis i.e. to support another party in their point of view, always provided that this wasn't in direct conflict with their own interests and provided that they themselves were supported later or had already been supported in return.
- inclined to hold that, whatever the line that they might be vigorously pursuing to further their own interests, there was still a common problem ground somewhere in the middle that they had some

kind of official commitment to try and sort out.

This conceptual separation between an individual's and the group's interests is a well researched phenomenon (for example, Anderson and Graesser, 1976; Black, 1948; Cooper, 1975; Curtis, 1974; Dearborn and Simon, 1958; Doise, 1969; Driver and Streufert, 1969; Dror, 1968; Hall, Mouton and Blake, 1963; Lewin, 1952; Moscovici, 1969; Shaw, 1932, 1947; Thomas and Fink, 1961). Using a gaming analogy, it is almost as if an individual and the working group of which he is a member could be denoted as separate players in the same game. J, the Planning Department's representative on the Housing Assessment Team alluded to this idea in lay terms when I was asking him how he saw the outcome of the case developing.

"It is as though I am wearing two completely different hats, which is a rather strange idea when you think about it. I am a planner by background and also by departmental allegiance really. But I also have this Housing Assessment part of the job. I mean from that point of view this complex of flats that H and B are proposing are a good idea. Functional sort of housing units and not too expensive - funded by private money as well. But they're pretty grim looking, you know. It's a terrible shame that people have to live in hutches like that. When you think of

how civilised parts of the city are, and indeed were a couple of hundred years ago. We're going steadily backwards really. But people don't seem to mind. They queue up for these places actually."

Here, J is reiterating the concept of a bureaucracy in the Weberian sense (Weber, 1947). The oft recognised distinction between the individual 'as a person' and 'speaking as a member of ...' Understanding their actions involves understanding these different reference points, understanding when you are watching the individual and when the member of the organisation. The two identities can merge together also and individual views can be propounded within an organisational framework or vice versa. Nowhere is this kind of schizophrenia more common than in the world of local government. The officers' whole training and culture rests upon putting aside their own personal opinions, aiming to be 'neutral', 'objective', 'non-political'. But of course they cannot be and so a researcher is always coming up against such disclaimers as 'off the record ...', 'wearing my departmental hat ...', 'speaking as me personally ...', 'being non-political now ...' as markers between the bureaucracy and the man.

In the Bedford Street case, the prospective developers of the site are perhaps in a clearer cut position

than anyone else on the question of individual interests. They have a plan which they presumably believe would be profitable for them to put into action. Before they can do this, certain official requirements have to be met. Mr H, owner of the land in question, saw his objectives quite clearly:

"It's simply business for me. I've had this land for a while now - bought it up quite cheaply when I had a bit of capital to spare. Then just sat on it. I reckoned it couldn't do any harm. I know B through the Rotary and he came up with this scheme. We just want to make a bit of money. You've got to find it where you can these days. I think the council are basically on our side because the city needs more housing in this middle bracket. They've got to be seen to going along with the Bath planning principles though. It's all hot air though. That whole area is not much to write home about. It wouldn't really matter a damn what we put up so long as it does the job."

H has a gamelike view of the situation. Conflict seems to be part of his analysis; '... the council are basically on our side ...' His purpose appears to be well-defined; '... We just want to make a bit of money ...' He has a model of how an important opponent sees the situation; '... got to be seen to be going along with the Bath planning principles ...'

When I spoke with him about the case, he also seemed to see it very much in terms of a 'fun' game also and was interested in the whole business of weaving his way through it much as he might perhaps enjoy a game of 'Monopoly'.

The City Council members principally involved with this case are those who sit on the Planning Committee. Disentangling their motives is even more difficult than it is for the paid officers. Party politics and the rough and tumble of life in the chamber are overlaid upon everything else. Some of the comments made by the councillors who attended the Planning Committee meeting which finally accepted H and B's proposals help to throw some light upon this problem:

Councillor H observed:

"If you remember, I was opposed to this scheme at our last meeting, but all those residents in the area that I have spoken to since then would prefer housing development in Bedford Street to industrial development. Perhaps it's not such a bad idea after all."

Here we seem to have a change of mind apparently occasioned by the democratic process of canvassing the views of some of the ward members. Perhaps these are important participants in Councillor H's view of

the game. Perhaps her change of mind is a contingent strategy to a particular strategy selected by the ward members. Unlikely; this would be a far too simplistic way to explain her reaction. Firstly, to be able to conceive of the ward members as a cohesive, strategic group requires stretching the imagination a long way. Indeed, one of them that I talked to made the following comment:

"Everyone's getting excited over nothing if you ask me. Whatever they put on that bit of wasteland would be better than the slum it is at the moment. But nobody can really see down there anyway, except the people in the house next to the Bank. And they're such a scruffy shower that they wouldn't really notice. Typical council - always getting busy about things that don't matter."

Hardly the response of a grand strategist. At the same time, having heard Councillor H speak on a number of previous occasions, it seems quite likely that she is taking the case seriously and does view her relationship with the ward members in somewhat public-spirited terms. It seems as though she is on the council to serve the interests of the public and will be largely directed by what they have to say.

Councillor R spoke in favour of the scheme, but his

view of some of the local residents who had objected to the outline proposals was interesting:

"I am sure that this development will improve the area for all concerned, even if some of the residents don't think so at the moment."

If he sees the residents as participants in some kind of game, then he obviously doesn't regard them as potentially very influential. It is rather as though they are standing on the touchline than actually impinging onto the field of play.

Councillor A spoke about her objection to the housing proposals:

"Although, as I think I made clear last session, I am in principle in favour of housing as opposed to any industrial development, my objection to this particular scheme is about the actual height of the proposed blocks of flats. The two main blocks at the extreme west end of the site would significantly obstruct the view from the nearby properties. Also the architecture is frightful and I think that the whole question of development on the riverbank is one that we ought to be thinking about very seriously indeed."

Here, Councillor A seems to allude to three sets of interested parties. The developers themselves, residents in nearby houses whose views out to the south of the city would be seriously affected by the new buildings, and a public at large, who might be affected environmentally by uncontrolled development along the river bank. In a more immediate sense, there is presumably another party figuring somewhere in her thinking, i.e. Councillor R, in reply to whose last comment she made her own point. At the same time, rather like Councillor H, she seems to be operating more upon the level of principles than that of strategy. Her model of her own role as a councillor is based firmly upon the idea of public service. Although, as a long serving councillor, she must be attuned to the Politics and politics of the chamber, she seems to regard these activities as ripples upon the real business of deciding upon policy in the public interest. As she observed to me:

"Of course you have to get involved in politics, with both a large and a small p. But that's not really our main business. We are here to work out harmonious compromises on behalf of the public. I think we all try and bear in mind what is best for them in the end."

Following up this line, I asked Councillor A if she

saw her job as a councillor in terms of a strategist, like a general running a war.

"It sometimes feels a bit like that, especially when feelings start running a bit high in the chamber. You can sometimes be under fire, as it were, from everyone at once - your own party, the opposition, the public, and they can be pretty ungrateful you know. Sometimes you wonder why on earth you're doing it all. But in the end, when things calm down, I think that we're really all on the same side."

It is difficult to conceive of a game of strategy in which everyone was on the same side and, hence, matching a game-theoretic structure to whatever implicit model of interaction that is presumably driving Councillor A's behaviour would seem to be both difficult and inappropriate.

When we come to consider the reactions of the paid officers of the Planning Department, we come across similar examples of an apparent unawareness of strategic motivations. It is interesting to note a comment made to me by one of the planning officers, G, just before a meeting of the Planning Committee:

"Well, you'll be able to see some real pantomime when the Planning Committee swings into action. If

you can make any coherent sense out of that bunch then you'll deserve a Ph.D. It's all good slapstick - a bit like watching an old film. You're sure you've heard those lines somewhere before and you're pretty sure what's going to happen next, give or take the odd variation."

Any notion of game in his perception of the situation was more akin to pantomime than strategic manipulation. There are no high stakes with plot and counter plot, but only the immediate ramblings of a familiar group of people on a Wednesday evening.

J, however, had a different view again:

"Of course, it's often said that getting something through is really a question of who you know. That line is over-rated but there's sometimes some truth in it. There was a bit of a fracas a couple of years back because one of the more influential members had been on holiday with a chap who was hoping to get clearance to open a small chain of fast-food bars."

When I asked him about the Bedford Street case, though, he was inclined to see it in rather uncomplicated terms:

"I'm sure there is nothing like that going on here, though. The stakes are not very high. It doesn't

really matter to H whether the flats go ahead or not I don't think. The finance side of it sounds a bit marginal anyway. What everyone seems to have forgotten about in all this are the old cottages themselves, which are listed, after all. But they can't seem to hold the councillors' interest for more than a few seconds at a time."

M, another HAT member from the Planning Department, had obviously given this question some thought himself. He was prepared to offer a theory about how discussants appeared to maintain stances which were clearly juxtaposed but without any apparent reasons why anything other than a state of entropy ought to preside.

"It's a funny thing. You talk about individual motives and so on. Most of the time, whether at the HAT sessions or at committee meetings or at our own departmental gatherings, nobody has much to gain or lose one way or the other. But the tension often builds up as though it was a summit conference or something. It almost seems as though the participants are competing for their identities. It's as if their own ideas and points of view need to be accepted by the others as some kind of confirmation that they are real people."

Here is the suggestion that strategic interactions can also include those in which the potential payoffs and costs are essentially represented by the support or denial of debating positions, even though no money or material values attach to or are implied by these positions. This seems to be something different from the kind of transaction between discussion contributions that have, for example, been examined in some detail at the Harvard Laboratory of Social Relations (Bales, 1950a, 1950b, 1951, 1953; Bales, Strodtbeck, Mills and Roseborough, 1951). It is not just that we appear to be observing the mutual support of points framed in the course of discussion, a support that is characterised by an immediate gratification of acceptance within the group. It is also that individual members may act in a sense strategically, in order to maintain and develop a system of beliefs and ideas that is vital to them personally because it is central to their sense of self, and to their ability to understand what is happening around them and locate their own efforts relative to the activities of everyone else. The general purpose is to dispel and to minimise the possibilities for 'cognitive dissonance' (Festinger, 1957).

M also observed that:

"Of course sometimes it just seems as though people

are competing just for the fun of it or because it seems to be the natural thing to do."

This is in support of a view propounded by Goffman (1970):

"... persons often don't know what game they are in or whom they are playing for until they have already played. Even when they know about their own position, they may be unclear as to whom, if anybody, they are playing against, and, if anyone, what his game is, let alone his framework of possible moves. Knowing their own possible moves, they may be quite unable to make any estimate of the likelihood of the various outcomes or the value to be placed on each of them. And bad moves often lead not to clear-cut penalties conceptualized as such, but rather to diffuse and straggling undesired consequences - consequences which result when persons do something that throws them out of gear with the social system."

So that in a working world that is recognised to be more or less competitive, perhaps what might be called a strategic stance is taken up almost out of habit. The strategy is not clearly formulated or thought out, those of the dimly observed opponents not analysed in careful preparation, the values and purpose guiding behaviour and responses not in any

case at all clear. But each is on his guard against attack of some kind, eager to score a point when it is possible, anxious to validate his own ideas and opinions and to have them recognised by the rest.

When I talked to the tenant of one of the Bedford Street cottages, Mr T, he seemed to be expressing a view that supported this hypothesis. When I asked him whether he felt that his interests were being adequately represented by HAT (R had been to see him a number of times) and by the Planning Committee (two of the member councillors had come round one evening), he was both annoyed and resigned:

"I don't know what they're all up to. The chap from Housing (R) wanted to know what the councillors had asked. The councillors wanted to know if I would be interested in moving out to Oldfield Park. And then H came along and suggested I might like to move into one of his flats. They might never be built, I told him, and anyway I couldn't afford his sort of prices. It seems to me that everyone's chasing each other's tail just for the hell of it and nobody knows what they want to do. Even the builder isn't sure whether to go ahead or not. Trouble is, we're in the middle and we don't know whether we're going to have a roof over our heads this time next week."

We have been concerned in this section of Chapter 3 with the question of the extent to which the particular case under discussion does or does not exhibit any of the characteristics associated with Bennett's (op. cit.) notion of a Hypergame. As we have explained earlier, it is not our intention here formally to construct such a system. This is not only a tortuous and rather artificial process, but it is also our belief that a model like this with the spaces 'filled in' is of considerably less explanatory value than a discursive interplay between its fundamental concepts and the observed events of a case. Bennett (1978) noted himself that:

"... it could be objected that the games and stability criteria were constructed and chosen in such a way that they had to give the expected and desired results. Clearly it is impossible to completely disperse this suspicion, but it is hoped that the sometimes rather lengthy descriptions of players' perceptions do provide a basis for critical scrutiny of the problem formulation."

We would argue that it is precisely his 'sometimes rather lengthy descriptions of players' perceptions' taken together with the concepts surrounding the Hypergame, that throw light upon the situation. On its own, the bald and necessarily simplistic game

matrix structure is intriguing but not revealing. Thus, in the present case, we have brought concepts and observations close together to see how each can illuminate the other. We are interested to try and see the events in the terms of Hypergame and vice versa. We continue this process more specifically in the next section by considering the question of deciding upon the players of a hypergame, and then go on in similar vein to look at the definition of outcomes and the attribution of aims and strategies.

3.4.2 Selecting the Players

Typically, in game-based analyses of empirically observed events, the issue of who are to be taken as players of the game is regarded as completely non-problematic. The traditional game-theoretic framework has as one of its primitive requirements a precisely-defined set of participants and the 'analysis' proceeds by attributing options, aims and strategies to each.

This particular primitive is also a formal requirement of the Hypergame. Although this more generalised extension of the basic mathematical concept of a game allows for players' differing perceptions of their opponents' situations, it does not allow that they have different ideas about who the players of the game are. Yet, in real-life examples of strategic

interaction, although individual players may themselves have very clear views about who the important participants are, there need not be either a complete or even partial overlap of player sets in this respect. So that, for example, A may include B in his set of players, but B may not necessarily regard A as a participant in the same terms. Also, there may be a third party, C, known to A but not to B, who is having a significant determining effect upon the situation in which A and B have an interest. Or D, regarded by B but not by A as an important person in the affair, may actually be totally without material influence, except in so far as B's belief in his power affects his own actions and responses.

So that different 'players' may have different ideas about who the other players are, and events which are highly germane to a particular individual's objectives may be triggered by people of whose existence he was entirely unaware, i.e. by unknown players. The effects of this kind of configuration may be quite complex, in that such a participant may be forced either to revise his ideas about the players, or to attribute unexplained events to 'chance', or to assume that one of his set of players was responsible.

By the same token, a particular player may have no

very clear idea about who are the important 'significant others' within a given set of circumstances. He may be unsure, that is, about who the rest of the players are.

We shall look now at the different and rather loosely defined, player sets as they seem to be perceived by the five groups of interested parties that we have been discussing in 3.4.1.,

- i.e. - The members of the Housing Assessment Team;
R, J and M in particular.
- The potential developers of the block of flats, Mr H and B's Ltd.
 - The Councillors who sit on the Planning Committee; particularly H, R and A.
 - The officers from the City Planning Department, J, G and M.
 - The families who live in the Bedford Street cottages, represented by Mr T.

(i) Players perceived by Members of HAT

When I asked R who he thought were the people who would be significant contributors to the outcome of this case, he made the following observations:

"We've got quite a lot of power between us here on the team. J and M are the professional planners and the committee takes notice of whatever they have to

say, particularly J, and if the Housing Assessment Report also ties in with that, it represents a lot of weight. The developers can't do very much themselves except keep an eye on how the land is lying and make adjustments to their detailed plans as necessary. At the end of the line is Mr T and the others next door who can't do anything at all except put their case when asked. The whole business is really being handled by the bureaucrats."

R seems to see 'the professionals' as being the most important players within this situation. The Councillors have the final say, but will be guided by what the officers recommend. J, in particular, he sees as a key man whose judgement and opinions will carry a lot of weight. R sees the developers as players, but players who have essentially to react to the moves of the officers and councillors. The families who live in the Bedford Street cottages he sees as being almost completely powerless. About them, R went on to say:

"It's HAT's business to look after their interests. We are their representatives and are here to act on their behalf. We try to take what we think they would like into account in any schemes that we draw up."

In R's terms, the families are subsumed as players under the auspices of HAT. They don't really exist as separate 'strategic entities' except in so far as HAT or the Planners will react to their requests or perceived needs.

When I asked J about the players in the case, he was inclined to attribute more power than R did to the councillors:

"Sometimes they listen to what we say and sometimes they don't. It's a bit of a game of chance and really depends on how they feel on the night. One or two of them are quite capable of disregarding anything that the officers say and going their own sweet way."

J also regarded developers in general as having plenty of room to swing events:

"These are the people who in the end can get things done after all. They have the money and the motivation. If we can work with them to design a scheme that is beneficial to all concerned, including the city area in a very general sense, then that is good news for the council. People with proposals like that often don't realise how much say they could have. The councillors in particular always make it seem as though they have the whip hand. But there is often

quite a bit of room for manoeuvre."

So that it is interesting to note that, even between the two most senior and active members of the Housing Assessment Team, there is a significant difference in who they regard as being the most influential players in the game. M, the second planning member of HAT, was concerned about the power of the families who lived in the cottages:

"They could make a mark in theory, but they don't realise it. T could easily start kicking up about how the interests of the underprivileged were being trodden on by business. The local press would lap it up and the council would soon take notice. Whereas T could be at the centre of the stage he's actually condemned to be a member of the audience."

Here M agrees with R that Mr T cannot be regarded as an important player within the system, although he does believe that T has the potential to make himself one.

(ii) Players perceived by the Developers

When I asked Mr H about who was likely to be helping to determine the future of his scheme, he seemed to see the situation as a rather straightforward competition between himself and the Planning Committee:

"It's just a question of whether they take to the idea and whether they've got anything to lose or gain by it themselves. I don't think they have actually in this case. But one or two friends of mine who've been in a similar situation have told me a few interesting stories. Course you can swing things your own way if you know someone on the committee, but I don't know any of them."

Bearing J's earlier observations in mind, I asked H how he thought the officers in the Planning Department could effect the outcome of his application. He didn't seem to attribute any influence to them at all:

"They're just a load of civil servants really, shuffling papers about and coming round with a tape measure every so often. The councillors do what they feel like in the end."

Whereas J had been regarded by R as a significant influence upon events, here was H dismissing him as a paper shuffler who took the odd measurement now and again.

(iii) Players perceived by the Councillors

One of the characteristics of the Councillor's responses to my inquiries was a certain formality

of response and a general reluctance to stray from talking in terms of the 'proper' channels of communication. Their replies are, nevertheless, informative. Councillor H was perhaps the most formal:

"We are sitting in committee to represent the electorate, that is, all the inhabitants of the city whatever their persuasion, colour or creed. We try to evaluate every proposal on its own merits and take into account how it contributes to the overall well-being of Bath. The officers are there to give us impartial professional advice although, between you and me, some of them have got some pretty weird ideas. They may have planning diplomas and this, that and the other, but when it all comes down to it, common sense, judgement and a broad view are what is required."

Here, it is possible to observe some tension between councillor and professional, the latter perhaps being regarded by the former as over-theoretical or not sufficiently practical. Also, Councillor H sees the planning process as principally an interchange between the elected representatives and those that they represent. Those that are applying for any form of planning consent are seen as having their case judged in the light of an implied set of community standards which comprise a diverse set of criteria that requires breadth of vision and experience to balance.

Councillor H has a somewhat paternal view of his elected role and does not appear to regard any of the participants in cases that come his way as standing on strictly equal terms with the committee members. In a hypergame sense, he would probably not accord such participants the status of 'players'.

Councillor R operates with a similar kind of perspective. The elected representatives are seen to mediate within the melee of conflicting interests that would otherwise be pursued anarchically in the community 'outside'. But her view was different from that of H in that she appears to have a sense of strategy as it is operated by members of the electorate (although not, apparently, by the councillors themselves). When I asked her about how the various parties that comprise a planning case interact with each other, she gave a characteristically 'balanced' reply:

"It is up to us to try and see fair play and to make sure that every relevant interest is taken into account. Most of us are aligned with certain party views of course, but Local Government tends to be more tolerant of different sects than does Central Government. We like to give the officers a good hearing because they are the professionals and devote a lot of time and thinking to their subject. But lay opinions are just as important, even if they are often

not particularly well-considered or thought through. What we have to be careful of is business interests, because then you can start getting people trampled on for the demon profit. It's still amazing to me how devious individuals can become once there is some money at stake."

For Councillor R, the 'players' are the business men 'out there' whose behaviour has to be carefully watched.

Councillor A's position was that of protector of the underdog and, in common with Councillor R, believed that business objectives would usually prevail over everything else unless there was some specific machinery set up to prevent them from doing so. The Planning Committee was part of that machinery:

"If everyone had their own way, Bath would not only look pretty sordid but the strong would be taking advantage over the weak in all sorts of ways. I mean in the case you've mentioned, although it wouldn't be proper for me to talk about it in any detail, I am sure you realise that someone's living space is being strongly threatened by a commercial development. Commerce must go on of course for us all to survive, but at what price, that is what we have to decide. The home environment of two families

is worth an awful lot, to them and, ultimately, to everyone else."

None of the councillors that I spoke to about the Bedford Street case would discuss the details, since the application by Mr H and B's Ltd. was still current and sub judice. Their general views of the planning process and their own part in it was illuminating, however, and there seemed to be some important common threads running through each of their perceptions of possible players of a hypergame.

Firstly, they tended to dissociate themselves from the events of a case. They were the people who looked at all the facts and arguments and arrived at some compromise 'solution' that took into account the variety of interests of those that they represented.

Secondly, strategy and deviousness tended to be associated with business and the pursuit of profit. Conversely, the ordinary man-in-the-street was regarded as basically a good chap, if a little helpless, and his interests clearly needed to be protected from the inexorable march of commerce, which in turn was seen as a necessary evil that needed a tight rein.

Thirdly, they, the councillors themselves, were seen

as having the ultimate power to decide upon the outcome of a case. They were not seen to be negotiating with other parties so much as pronouncing verdicts upon them.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly from the point of view of looking at events with reference to the notion of a hypergame, none of the councillors that I talked with mentioned any ideas which suggested how 'outsiders' might regard the Planning Committee and its members. There was no articulated corporate self-image and no sense that what they were presented to deal with might have something to do with how they were perceived both as individuals and as a body.

(iv) Players perceived by the Planners

We have partly covered this category in considering J's and M's comments as members of the Housing Assessment Team itself. But it was interesting to discover some of J's views about his dual involvement in this case i.e. as a member of HAT and as a planning officer whose professional opinion was being consulted in its own right. He seemed to see HAT as a separate entity from himself the planner. Could they be, in a sense, regarded as two different players?

"HAT takes up about 15% of my time. It is a sort of day-to-day, sharp end planning activity really,

although I'm sure that R would call it something different. Each small case gets the same treatment and, bit by bit, the city gets tidied up and the housing stock improved and increased. Our Housing Assessment involves a lot of attention to detail - the building regulations, the most tedious tome ever written incidentally; tenancy agreements, conditions for receiving grants. All that is none of my business. I really oughtn't to be there for most of the meetings."

J is distancing himself from the more mundane activities of HAT and reinforcing his identity as a skilled professional with a wider brief. He went on to say:

"If there is ever any conflict between me the planner and me the HAT member, it is the planner that prevails. Not that it ever comes to that really, since we are all working closely together all the time."

It does not appear that J sees HAT and Planning as opposing or even distinct forces in any strategic sense. But G is not so sure. He is one of the more junior planners as regards his location within the hierarchy, although not one of the youngest. He has some caustic opinions of Local Government Departments which he is not slow to voice. He is generally popular with the main body of the staff, but not so

much with the managers:

"Housing Assessment is a bit of a non-job really. All this fuss about the 'Team' and the departments working together. All they're doing is repairing a few broken-down houses. M seems to quite enjoy it, but then he's a bit of a conservation crank. J would rather not have anything to do with it. I mean with this Bedford Street business, all they're doing is whistling in the breeze. The developers probably know a couple of the councillors and they'll all sort it out between them. The people in the two cottages probably don't even want to stay there. It's a pretty grotty area, let's face it."

On the one hand, G is inclined to the view that R and J are in opposing camps of some kind, or at least not in the same camp. But on the other, he doesn't really believe that there is very much to be opposed about. His two significant groups of players in the Bedford Street case are the developers and the councillors on the planning committee. Even then, he sees them as likely to be working together towards a mutually acceptable solution rather than being at odds with each other. There are no real stakes, he seems to be saying, so there is nothing worth getting strategic about.

(v) Players perceived by the residents of the cottages

The only member of the families that I was able to talk to at any length was Mr T, a retired lorry driver who lived with his wife and youngest son in the house furthest away from the main road and therefore closest to the proposed development. He saw almost everyone as players except himself, in a game that he couldn't begin to understand.

"Nobody tells us what's going on. They're all arguing it out among themselves. If they decide to pull these cottages down I expect someone will drop in and let us know the day before the bulldozers arrive. Heaven knows who ever thought of putting a block of flats down there anyway. It's a bloody crazy idea. I've told them that the land all along this part of the river is soggy but nobody listens to me. It's all a storm in a teacup except they're talking of knocking our house down."

T has no strategy himself, no sense of having any hand to play. He is only free to observe events and fit in with whatever is decided. His view of the key figures in the case, H, whom he knows, the planning officers, the councillors, is not that they are cunningly manoeuvring in pursuit of their own interests but rather that they are locked into argument for the sake of argument. He had already suggested that H

wasn't even sure himself whether he wanted to go ahead with the scheme or whether it was financially viable.

We have been concerned here to consider how each of the set of potential players that we have selected have perceived 'significant others' (Jones, 1982) to be part of the case. We move on now to look at how the same group of people visualise some of the possible aims and strategies of these significant others and how they see the scope for various outcomes to the case.

3.4.3 Aims and Strategies

For each of the groups covered in the previous section, we have sought to draw together some of their ideas about the objectives and likely plans of the other participants in the case. It must be understood that these all represent our interpretations of what the people concerned have said, and even these have been summarised for the sake of brevity. As aforementioned, we have deliberately avoided the arbitrarily constraining strategy structure of the hypergame, but have rather attempted to use the basic concepts proposed by Bennett (op. cit.) to give some perspective to the material.

(i) Aims and Strategies perceived by members of HAT

R's group of main players comprises the local government officers, the councillors and the developers in probably that order of importance. The officers he sees as having essentially bureaucratic aims, laid down by their job descriptions and possibly overlaid by the desire to do well in order to maintain promotion chances. R gets job satisfaction from his own work and also attributes that to his colleagues. He therefore believes that in making any decisions or recommendations, both the planners and the members of the Housing Assessment Team will be guided by their own professional codes, each of which will influence the content of what they will have to say. That is, the planners will make planning oriented contributions, R and his environmental health officers will be concerned with public health issues and the building surveyors will confine their recommendations to structural matters and the interpretation of the building regulations.

R seems to think that the councillors will be guided by what the officers have to say. The only personal aims that he sees for them are to do with appearing competent as councillors and scoring debating points at committee meetings, neither of which he believes will have much tangible effect upon the eventual outcome of the case. The developers he sees as

having a more or less clearly defined personal interest, but as having very little scope for action within the confines of the planning regulations. He believes that they would like to get their plans passed with as little amendment as possible and without incurring any significant costs to do with any housing provisions for the two families.

J has a less optimistic view of the power of the officers than R does. He sees the councillors as being rather unpredictable in their reactions to recommendations from the departments, "depends on how they feel on the night." He believes, like R, that their main personal motivations come from a desire to put on good performances and have their contributions taken seriously and, preferably, agreed with. At the same time, he sees most of them as being essentially public spirited. As he remarked to me:

"They're basically a good bunch, even if some of them do go on rather. I think you've got to be a little arrogant to be a councillor and it's a real ego trip for one or two of them. But I can't really understand why they do it. Just as well that somebody does, I suppose."

J's perception of the Developers is tinged with

scepticism. Although he would like to see some improving development in the Bedford Street area, he doesn't believe that the present scheme is quite right or that it is financially sound.

"I reckon that it's all a bit marginal, despite R's calculations. I think B knows that as well, but they're going for the planning permission to get it under their belt. That site is a bit dodgy though. I wouldn't like to say how far down you'd have to pile to reach something solid. That could be quite an expensive business."

J's view of the officers' objectives concurs broadly with that of R i.e. that they operate within the formal guidelines laid down by their departments and professionals, much as proposed in Weber's 'Bureaucratic Administration' (op. cit.). He differs from R in believing that there is considerable scope for the interpretation of these guidelines and that developers with valuable proposals and good backing have the power to negotiate favourable terms with the planners. This seems to imply the existence of some pressure upon the planners from somewhere to 'get things done', a pressure which R does not feel in his own line of work.

Finally, M has a view of the situation which might be

summed up by a comment with which he once finished a long plea for the families at one of the HAT meetings:

"Once again, it seems to be business against the innocent man-in-the-street. H and B want to turn a bit of profit. T and his family want to live in peace. Since T cannot stand up for himself, it's up to us to do it for him."

Commerce against the underdog. M believes that the developers are out to make a fast pound and don't mind who they interfere with along the way. He believes that they have the power to lobby both councillors and officers in a way that T cannot. T's best plan is to align himself with the Housing Assessment Team who in turn, ought to mediate in his favour. M regards the councillors themselves as being fickle, no more likely to take one party's side than any other.

(ii) Aims and Strategies perceived by the Developers

It is probably true to say that Mr H regards the officers of the Planning Department as being, to all intents and purposes, aimless, "... They're just a load of civil servants really, shuffling papers about and coming round with a tape measure every so often." He doesn't believe that they can have any serious influence on the outcome of the case at all. The

councillors are his main stumbling block, as he sees it. But H did not seem to have any clear idea about what motivated them. He clearly found it difficult to comprehend the satisfactions of local government politics:

"Can't fathom what they're up to at all. Hours and hours talking about the same old sorts of subjects. It has got to be done I suppose, but it doesn't seem that important and some of them get so worked up. It wasn't as if they got paid. Perhaps they just like hearing the sounds of their own voices."

B, proprietor of B's Ltd., had had a lot of dealings with the council in his many years working in and about the city. His line was that it is all really a question of getting on with the people concerned:

"Very occasionally you come across a councillor with business interests that may clash or coincide with yours. But it doesn't happen very often, and even when it does they tend to declare themselves and not get involved. But if they take to you and you can get on with them, then what would otherwise be obstacles can be eased away. They're an OK crowd really, one or two are a bit pompous but usually their hearts are in the right place."

B's own strategy for dealing with the councillors is to get to know several of them and then to carry out his gentle diplomacy through these personal contacts. There is no suggestion here that there is any kind of improper collaboration over the scheme. It is simply that B believes that if some of the councillors know and like him, then the chances of his scheme being passed will be significantly increased. His implicit model of how the councillors carry out their evaluation seems to assume that they are inclined to favour a well thought through proposal which has been carefully put together by a decent sort of citizen who seems to know what he is talking about.

"If the thing first of all looks tasteful, or fits in with the general area, that's the first hurdle. Then it needs to seem to make financial sense, be well backed and look as though it will get finished. One of the most important bits of that question is what sort of bloke they reckon they're dealing with."

Here B is imputing to the councillors a way of thinking that is often associated with the small business man i.e. that the most important aspect of any working deal is to know your man. This is partly a question of whether there is a basis for mutual trust and, hence, whether both parties feel comfortable about going ahead with the arrangement, since both

will presumably be taking some risks. But it is also a question of efficiency in the matter of dealing with complexity. If each side 'knows his man,' then a lot of details can be left to each other to handle without their having to be raised explicitly.

When I asked B about the families in the two cottages, not only did he not regard them as a problem; he seemed to think that they would benefit significantly from being forced to move out:

"Those places are damp and crumbling and nobody ought to be living in them. They're well under the regulations and, to be quite honest, it isn't worth anybody's money to bring them up to scratch. Listed they may be, but then so is most of the older stuff in this city. Quite a lot of that is not worth keeping either. I'd lay you a case of Scotch that both T and the family next door would be happy for an excuse to be moved at someone else's expense."

(iii) Aims and Strategies perceived by the Councillors

We have seen how the councillors on the Planning Committee maintain a degree of distance from those involved in presenting them with proposals, or recommendations about proposals. The likely strategists as far as they are concerned seem to be businessmen submitting planning proposals that endeavour to

minimise any costs associated with unnecessary aesthetics or matching to the immediate environment. Some of the gamesmanship in such cases lies in how the schemes are presented. Making a proposed development look stunning on paper is an important skill of the architect. Enticing graphics and clever advertising are what the councillors have to take in and visualise in practice. On this subject, Councillor R commented that:

"Some of them can make the most boxy, thrown together, cut-to-the-bone development look like something out of Country Life. And the imagination of the copy-writers knows no bounds. That is what we're really trying to get behind, that and some idea of the backing so as we can estimate the likelihood of the thing being finished. There's nothing more unsightly than building work standing for ages half-finished because of lack of finance."

For Councillor R, the gloss on a written proposal is a form of strategy that it is her business to interpret. For Councillor H, a different kind of gloss coming from the planning officers also represents strategy in a similar kind of way. In his view, the professional planners are often trying to score points over the lay councillors by dressing their recommendations and comments in technical jargon:

"They'll often try and appear a bit cleverer than us. Some of my colleagues are intimidated by some of the planning department reports, but a lot of it is just hot air. I mean, not only do we have to get behind the blarney of the architects, but the people who are supposed to be there to help us are at it as well. I sometimes think they're a bit desperate to justify their jobs."

Councillor A did not appear to have the same sense of being surrounded on all sides by deception, although she was strongly aware of the pressures from business interests and was mindful of a need to keep them under control. Her view of such interests was not that they would always per se involve some deception on the part of the protagonists, but that the built-in incentives to succeed would somehow almost automatically ensure that those interests were cast as vitally important to all concerned and always presented in a favourable light against all other lobbies:

"The developers that we come across have a way of putting things that is almost second nature to them. It is salesmanship I suppose, but it seems to carry forward into everything that they do. They don't even know that they're doing it half the time. But we must never allow ourselves to be taken in by it."

Not necessarily strategists, but salesmen whose slippery line needs to be handled with care. Whatever the intentions of the developers are, the councillors believe that their representations need careful decoding.

(iv) Aims and Strategies perceived by the Planners

We consider only G here, as J and M were covered under the Housing Assessment Team. As was noted in 3.4.2 (iv), G's two significant players in the Bedford Street case are the developers and the councillors on the planning committee. But he did not, apparently, see the interaction in strategic terms. He did, however, regard the two parties as having different, although not irreconcilable, interests:

"The developers want to get their plans passed, even if they're not too sure at the moment whether they would want to go ahead. It always adds to the value of the land anyway. They'd rather not have to make lots of resubmissions because that's all expense, what with the admin. and the architect's fees and so on. Then the councillors would like to see something that is an improvement over what is already there. They are the guardians of the public standards. But in a way, they're on the developers' side as well if the scheme looks good enough."

G's view of the developers' scope for action was that they could present their case more or less convincingly or professionally, but that that was about the extent of their room for manoeuvre. When I asked him about the difference that it might make by knowing some of the councillors personally, he was inclined to think that the effect was marginal:

"It doesn't seem to make much odds. In fact with the sort of people that you've got on the council, you can find that they'll bend over backwards to seem to be impartial and you might actually get a better deal if you din't know any of them."

(v) Aims and Strategies perceived by the Families

I asked Mr T who he thought was trying to get what out of this case:

"I'm not sure that anyone really knows. I suppose B and H thought they might be able to make a bit - I mean it's always good to have property isn't it. I don't think that H knew what he was letting himself in for though. If he knew he was going to have this much hassle, he wouldn't have bothered I reckon. B's a bit different of course, it's his bread and butter after all."

I then asked him what he thought the council would like

to see happen on the Bedford Street site:

"They can't make up their minds, that's the truth of it. But so long as there's something there to argue about, they'll keep on at it. It doesn't really matter to them one way or the other."

It is difficult to attribute any sense of strategy to Mr. T. It is not just that he cannot work out what everyone else is trying to achieve. He also doesn't believe that the other 'participants' know themselves. His view of the councillors is that they will continue to keep on talking just so long as there is something on the agenda, but that none of them has any real interest in the outcome of the case.

3.5 Summary Conclusions

We now summarise below some important conclusions arising from our application of Hypergame concepts to the empirical data provided by this particular HAT case. Further discussion and consideration is given in chapter 8, section 8.3.

Explanatory Description

The principal and significant value of the Hypergame model from a research point of view is that it provides a systematic framework for generating commentary, description and conclusions from raw data.

Each primitive element of the Hypergame focuses attention on a different aspect of the material and provides a triangulation point for the generation of meaning.

The Structure of Conflict

The Hypergame framework posits the basic elements of a strategic interaction. The 'gaps' are not filled in however. This can only happen when the data and the structure are brought together. Although it is probably true to say that there is a presumption of conflict in the formulation of the model, it is not true that by using the model we can only see and deal with conflict. The notion provides a kind of base-line from which aspects of conflict, non-conflict and degrees of conflict can be given perspective.

Definitions of the Situation

Probably the most valuable contribution that Bennett's notion of a Hypergame makes to the game theory and conflict literature is to formally recognise that different participants in a strategic interaction will have, in general, different perceptions of the circumstances of the interaction and different ideas about the aims, strategies and preferences of each other. This is an important starting point for useful and realistic analysis, but one which has not been reached hitherto in game theory.

What the structure then demands, of course, is an informed basis for filling in the gaps, that is, for attributing purpose, preferences and strategies to the players. This is the difficult part of the process, but one for which game theory itself has no hint of a solution. We are thrown away from the structure, which represents an initial statement of a research problem, and back towards the task of discovering the social meanings contained within the data. For that we need plenty of good data, which game theorists have in the past been more or less content to do without.

Definition of Player Sets

We find empirically that, in order to correspond more closely with real-life situations, the Hypergame model requires a further extension of its perceptual 'degrees of freedom'. It was apparent in the present research that the various participants had different ideas about who were the other significant parties in the interaction. Hence the Hypergame needs, strictly, to define a number of, in general, non-congruent player sets. Any possibility of a meaningful mathematic analysis, based upon the manipulation of strategy matrices, would probably then have to be given up for good. Bennett has suggested that this is difficult enough for straightforward two player hypergames. The further insight from applying the idea qualitatively

could be valuable, however, and we have demonstrated this in our own analysis.

4. A COLLECTIVE PURPOSE MODEL FOR THE HOUSING ASSESSMENT TEAM

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will examine the hypothesis that a decision-making group such as the Housing Assessment Team carries out its work against a pervading sense of both collective and corporate purpose; that the individual members will largely concur in their understanding of these purposes; and that they will act and debate in a more or less 'rational' way to further these objectives that are principally associated with official or group functions outside their own personal domain.

We look first at some of the dimensions of the concepts of collective and corporate purpose and consider how they might relate to more individually based objectives. In particular, we consider some of the ways in which these concepts seem to be applied in different circumstances within the world at large.

We then go on to extract some formulations of collective and corporate purpose for the Housing Assessment Team, drawing on some of the discussions relating to the Bedford Street case set out in the last chapter. The intention here is to try and uncover the part that these notions may play in determining the choices

and judgements made by the team members. Searching, as it does, for various points of congruence of the motives of some of the participants, this chapter attempts to add perspective to the last which, conversely, was more concerned to highlight differences of interest that might be expressed in terms of strategic behaviour.

4.2 On the nature of Collective and Corporate Purpose

It is clearly important to consider the distinction between corporate or bureaucratic purpose in Weber's organisational sense (Weber, op. cit.) and the kind of formulation of group objectives that may occur either completely outside the context of formal administrations or within a local sub-group convened under the auspices of an existing bureaucracy. March and Simon (1958) have noted that:

"The bureaucracy is a set of relationships between offices, or roles. The official reacts to other members of the organisation not as more or less unique individuals but as representatives of positions that have specified rights and duties. Competition within the organisation occurs within closely defined limits; evaluation and promotion are relatively independent of individual achievement."

This pure concept of bureaucracy must be regarded as an analytical type and appears in practice in various stages of dilution. Its most fundamental characteristic is the backing and demands of a 'legal' authority, of which Weber (op. cit.) has observed:

"... obedience is owed to the legally established impersonal order. It extends to the persons exercising the authority of office under it only by virtue of the formal legality of their commands and only within the scope of authority of the office."

Corporate objectives which have no foundation in a formal organisation but which are rather understood and recognised in terms of either collective interests or of group membership have a more elusive nature. The allegiance accorded them by participating individuals and the ways in which they are referenced are much more difficult to uncover than explicit or implied rules of bureaucracy.

Collective purpose models of group decision-making are of particular interest insofar as they coincide with many popular and widely held views of how groups at work do and, even more pervasively, how they should go about their business. Political rhetoric bandied about by politicians and men-in-the-street alike is rife with such expressions as 'what Britain ought to

be doing,' 'industry now needs to move forwards,' 'the union has now decided.' There is the implicit assumption, at least in the formulation of such expressions if not in their understanding, that the people of Britain, those who are involved in industry, the members of the union, each recognise a common corporate policy and are then able and willing to act in concert in its execution. A quotation taken almost at random from a recent edition of The Guardian illustrates this point further:

"It has transpired that the internal accord was not the panacea to the country's political ailments. Some would say that it has worsened the plight of the country's seven million people. Fragmentation of the nationalist movement has continued until, today, there are a plethora of political groupings whose policies militate against a 'national' solution. Party politics among the blacks have degenerated into intimidation and thuggery, some of the culprits proving an embarrassment to their party leaders in the courts."

Perusal of this short extract will reveal a number of notions and assumptions about corporate objectives. First, there is the idea of the corporate body 'country', as expressed in 'the country's political ailments', an idea with numerous parallels in

contemporary political discourse within the UK, for example in the commonly used expression 'the state of Britain today'.

'The plight of the country's seven million people' is another such expression, as is 'a plethora of political groupings whose policies (my emphasis) militate against a national solution'.

It is of course easy enough to case such concepts in a somewhat illusory light to underline the apparent crassness of grouping seven million people together and giving them a plight, to enquire caustically what it really means to talk about a country's political ailments, or to point to the real inherent conflicts that exist between many of those individuals working to generate 'the state of Britain today'. Yet it is a part of our thesis that, vague and simplistic as such ideas can be argued to be, they nevertheless hold a significant position in everyday discourse and therefore can hardly be ignored as being unreal. In the present context, they appear to be effective currency with the members of countless decision-making groups such as the Housing Assessment Team and clearly cannot be dismissed, therefore, as mere abstract ideals.

It is interesting to consider one or two hypothetical

examples of groups in action and to suggest how or if a group objective might have meaning for the members or for an outside observer.

'Survival' groups are rather extreme examples of collectives which might ostensibly operate with a clearly recognizable common purpose. Half a dozen survivors from a shipwreck, say, drifting about the ocean in a liferaft with a limited supply of food and water. Is it possible for an outside observer to formulate a common purpose for the group and how reasonable would it be to attribute such a purpose to the members? On the face of it, each individual is at least likely to hold for himself the objective of survival. This is a particularly human trait, although it could still possibly be the case that one or any of the members would regard the prospect of death in this way with some relief. He might be suffering from an incurable and increasingly painful disease, or perhaps he was previously in such a state of depression as to have been in any case contemplating suicide. Such a member would have a fundamentally different orientation to his circumstances than the others who were desperate to live, and the notion of a group objective would be difficult to define.

Even granted, though, that each person in the lifeboat was keen to survive, it is not immediately clear that

we can formulate this simply as a collective purpose. Theoretical conflicts of interest in Vickers' sense (op. cit.) can be perceived by an outsider but these may or may not be perceived by the members. Each, for example, is clearly in competition with the others for the limited reserves of food and water. If a member were to kill the rest of his companions in the lifeboat, he would be able to live for very much longer than if he were to share these resources in the normal, morally acceptable way. On the other hand, notwithstanding the question of food and water, it might be the case that the increased morale to be gained from having companions to talk to is, and would be perceived as being, an important survival factor.

Individual differences in the definition of the situation can complicate the concept of a group objective although they never seem to quite dissolve it. The ship's padre, a member of the lifeboat party, might not perceive any conflict between the members of the group, and could even be thinking in terms of sacrificing himself for the good of the others. Someone else may have calculated very coldly and precisely his best chances of survival with respect to each of the others.

There are situations in which it is clearly in most of the members' interests that a particular action is

carried out. When a ship is sighted on the horizon, all who are keen to survive would probably agree that they ought to try and attract its attention. Yet although we might interpret this as a realistic piece of corporate policy, the execution of this policy might be a considerable source of disagreement. Should they let off all their flares together in the hope of creating a significant effect? Should they let off one flare first and see what happens? Is the ship in any case too far off to see any flares and so should these be saved against the occasion of another ship passing closer to the liferaft?

It is not always easy for members of groups (or theorists about groups) to conceptually separate what looks like a corporate objective which none will dispute, from executive strategies which are a matter of policy interpretation and a potential source of disagreement.

Another example of a survival group is an army platoon on active service. Again, the threat of death is common to those members as it was in the previous example and a 'common enemy' might be recognised in both situations - the sea in the former case, the opposing forces perhaps in the latter. But here, the notion of the opposing army is itself a somewhat reified and collective concept. Writers about war

have often discussed the strange disparity between the abstract 'enemy' and the man 'just like you' but from the opposite side who stands before the soldier when the time for action comes. The notion of 'the enemy' does presumably provide some cohesion when used in the abstract for training purposes within the armed forces, and it is clearly a concept of some significance to troops contemplating a period of real action. It might well be a widely shared objective of a fighting company to 'destroy the enemy'. An articulated task such as this provides a basic *raison d'être* for the group. Yet, when an individual soldier is faced with one of 'the enemy' firing back at him, what then happens to any notion he might have of the group objective and, indeed, to his notion of the group. Self-interest may then predominate, although there are many examples of heroic behaviour which are difficult to explain except in terms of some ideal group objective taking priority over self-interest (unless self-interest is itself defined in such a way as to incorporate the satisfaction of an important 'heroic value').

The board of directors of a company provides a closer-to-home example of the kind of situation that can engender complex relationships between self-interest and group interest. In many analyses of political behaviour in such committees, what might be described

as a naive cynical perspective often pays close attention to the inherent conflict between, say, company board members, to the diversity of their individual interests and to the 'politicking' that is carried out to try and ensure that these interests prevail.

Yet in very few such meetings will it be impossible to identify abstract 'personalities' founded within a bureaucratic framework and with demands that require attention. The Company, the Department, the Shareholders, the Public, even the Board, may appear as referents in the discussion, referents which carry a significant amount of authority.

The marketing director may well have strong personal interests relating to career, status, private wealth and so on, but may recognise that these can be pursued, may probably be best pursued and possibly even only pursued by paying attention to the requirements of the corporation. Almost all of those who work within organisations appear to have some conception of the identity of 'the organisation', if only as a triangulation point for their own position. When asked, many may apparently be working to further what they believe to be the 'good of the company'. It is always possible, of course, to link definitions of self and corporate interest by asserting, for example, that the conscientious secretary who works unpaid overtime and doesn't

even have the satisfaction of having someone know about it, is acting in a self-interested way because by doing the overtime she keeps ahead of her work and hence reduces personal stress, or perhaps, one could even argue, to indulge a personal 'value' for good hard protestant endeavour.

Our board of directors, like the shipwrecked mariners, may also have some conception of a 'common enemy' and recognise that there will be situations in which they will be better off individually by sticking together and presenting some kind of common front to, say, a threat from the shareholders, or a union, or the press.

What we have been trying to point to thus far is the apparently complicated relationship between a group member's self-interest and his conceptions of and reaction to a corporate or collective interest.

Haworth (1959) has discussed this issue, which is at once an important philosophical question and a real practical problem in trying to uncover the predominant determinants of a group decision.

"One of the levels on which the long-standing dispute between reductivists and non-reductivists is going on is the level of social organisations. In a general way, the problem concerns the relation of men with organisations of men. On one side, it is contended

that only individuals act, and organisations are only men organised. On the other side, we find what is often felt to be a mystical insistence that organisations are entities in themselves apart from the men who make them up, and that these organisations act."

One of the important assertions of our own thesis is that these two perspectives ought not to be regarded in dichotomous or mutually exclusive terms. That is, it is quite possible for self interest to be pursued by members of a group who have, at the same time, a strong conception of the group and of group objectives, together with the motivation to achieve group objectives, sometimes at their individual expense.

Haworth (op. cit.) goes on to say something about the obligations which an individual may feel towards 'his organisation':

"When an individual becomes involved with an organisation, his involvement is not totally indefinite. It is, rather, specific in the sense that he acquires a function which is integral with the organisation's system of functions. The relation with the organisation which is thereby realised has, from the standpoint of the organisation, two complementary sides. Looking in one direction, we can say that the relation creates a duty (my emphasis). In the

first case, the specific involvement with the organisation implies that the individual will be provided with all of the means for the performance of his function which the organisation has to offer. Provision of these means grounds a right to perform that function, where 'right' means both capacity and authority. In the second case, the specific involvement with the organisation implies that the individual's performance of his function is anticipated by the system of functions in the sense that it can achieve its characteristic result only on condition that he does perform that function. The expectation is structured (my emphasis) and thereby grounds a duty to do that which his specific involvement entails."

A decision-making group such as the Housing Assessment Team clearly cannot sustain itself on the basis of self-interest alone. Each of the members has entered into and, more significantly, believes himself to have entered into contract with 'the organisation'. He has been provided with certain rights and there is the expectation, even if sometimes only in himself, that he will perform certain duties. This contract will be difficult to disregard in the course of daily business.

Simon (1964) has noted that:

"... we often have occasion to observe that the goals that actually underlie the decisions made in an organisation do not coincide with the goals of the owners, or of top management, but have been modified by managers and employees at all echelons. Must we conclude, then, that it is the goals of the latter - of subordinate managers and employees - that are governing organisational behaviour? Presumably not, because the kinds of behaviour taking place are not those we would expect if the managers and employees were consulting only their personal goals. The whole concept of an informal organisation, modified by, but not identical with, the goals either of management or of individual employees, becomes hazy and ambiguous if we follow this path."

Simon here reinforces our point that the relationship between self-interest and group or corporate interest may be a complicated one. In this discussion of complex motives, it is also appropriate to question the extent to which individuals are, in any case, motive-driven and, if they are, to consider the nature of the relationship between motives and action. There is the theoretical danger here that the concept of motive can be constructed as an intermediary explanatory variable that has no empirical reference.

Simon (op. cit.) goes on to say that:

"If by motivation we mean whatever it is that causes someone to follow a particular course of action, then every action is motivated - by definition. But in most human behaviour the relation between motives and action is not simple: it is mediated by a whole chain of events and surrounding conditions."

Parsons (1965) highlights the interactive and dynamic nature of the relationship between motives and actions when he says:

"The essentials of the interaction situation can be illustrated by any two-player game, such as chess. Each player is presumed to have some motivation to participate in the game, including a "desire to win". Hence, he has a goal, and relative to this, some conception of effective "strategies". He may plan an opening gambit but he cannot carry advance planning too far, because the situation is not stable: it is contingent on the moves made both by himself and by his opponent as the game proceeds. The basic facilities at his command consist of his knowledge of the opportunities implicit in the changing situation; his command of these opportunities means performance of the adaptive function. Hence, at the goal attainment and adaptive levels, goals are defined and facilities are provided, but specific acts are not prescribed."

An implication here is further uncertainty for the social researcher trying to relate the complex motives of a decision-making group to the outcomes that he observes. Parsons underlines the notion of contingency, and the kind of model that he thereby implies for explaining group-generated outcomes is almost a parallel to the statistical notion of the Markov Chain. The researcher is then faced with such questions as:

"If A had spoken before B, would C have then said something different and not reacted in the way that he did; and would D then have remained silent instead of disagreeing with B?"

Or

"Supposing that B's car had broken down this morning and he had been unable to get to the meeting. Would D have made his point so strongly? How might that have affected the final decision?"

It is important here to highlight the difference between what the statics and the dynamics of the situation are. In thinking about the nature of group objectives, it is on the one hand necessary to ask whether or not we think the concept has any empirical meaning and then what form group objectives take

for the members of the team. These are part of the statics of the group, what have been called elsewhere its purpose characteristics (Cumberlidge, 1978). Then, on the other hand, we can examine the way in which the statics relate to each other in the process of determining an outcome, i.e. the dynamics of a particular decision. As Gross (1969) has pointed out, there may be difficulties in matching the statics with the dynamics or, in his terms, the intentions with the activities.

"... measurement of the goals of the organisation requires a combination of the two measures of intentions and activities. We start with intentions as the basic measure and compare intentions with data on activities. In the usual condition they should support each other. Actual goals will then represent a type of average between these two measures when they are not too far apart. It is possible that there will be two kinds of divergence:

1. A goal may rank high as an intention but be only minimally evident in activities. Such a goal we call utopian. This condition indicates something that the members say they are trying to attain but are doing little actually to achieve it ...
2. A goal may be rated low as an intention but be much in evidence in activities. Such a condition indicates the presence of an unstated goal. Persons

may be unaware of this goal, be ashamed of it, or be unable or unwilling to talk about it."

Gross's last point again raises two important problems. First, that of drawing inferences about intentions from actions and, second, that of the status of 'goal' or 'motive' as a determinant of outcomes. Is it meaningful or useful to suggest that an individual might have a goal of which he is unaware?

Following on from this introductory discussion of the possible nature of a 'group objective' we turn back now to the case study outlined in 2.2 of the previous section and attempt, for a number of different groups involved in that case, to explain events in terms of a driving corporate rationale.

In order to lend substance to some of these ideas, we move on now to consider some articulations of corporate and collective purpose by members of the Housing Assessment Team. These expressions emerged in the course of the series of HAT meetings dealing with the Bedford Street case and from subsequent discussions with individual members.

4.3 Discovering Collective Purpose

The objectives of the Housing Assessment Team do not appear anywhere in any formal form, unlike most committees

which invariably have some kind of terms of reference set down somewhere, usually in the minutes of the first meeting. R, who had an important hand in starting the team, supplied the following list of objectives that he said that he works to both in an executive sense and as the chairman controlling the discussions at the HAT meetings.

4.3.1 R's statement of the objectives of HAT

- (i) To keep up to date with properties within the city area that require attention by the Housing Assessment Team.
- (ii) For each property on this list:
 - (a) classify as fit or unfit for housing in accordance with the criteria contained in Section 4 of the Housing Act 1957.
 - (b) If fit for housing, report to that effect and remove from the list. If unfit for housing, catalogue defects, suggest alternative means by which these defects could be made good and select the best alternative with reference to (iii)
- (iii) When deciding upon the best way in which to bring unfit housing up to the standard required by the Act, to try and weigh up the following:
 - the cost to the council, including rehousing

costs.

- The quality of the renovation, with respect to the body carrying out the works.
- the well-being of the occupants of the property.
- the middle and long-term housing requirements of the city, as defined at the time.
- the value of conservation versus demolition
- the overall quality of the surrounding environment.
- building regulations, as laid down by the Act.
- aesthetic considerations.

When R presented me with this statement, he also made the following supporting comments:

"All these criteria have got to be balanced and weighed according to the individual circumstances. That is our job, it's where the skill and experience come in. We're all professional really, answerable to our own departments and what their objectives are. But we are also working for the people of the City and we bear this in mind all the time. Sometimes it's possible to cut through a lot of red tape in particular cases."

Here, R seems to be accepting the bureaucratic objectives of his own department as important guidelines

for action, but he will 'interpret' these if they appear not to best further the interest of 'the City' in particular situations. The City appears here almost as a second authority to which he feels obliged to defer, within the principal constraints imposed by the authority of his own department.

It is instructive to consider similar statements by J and D. J is the senior planning department representative on HAT and D the senior valuer. We have singled out these members for individual analysis since they do much of the talking at HAT meetings and carry most of the authority; they are, with R, the most significant contributors to the output of the team.

4.3.2 J's statement of the objectives of HAT

J provided the following structure when I asked him for some thoughts on the purpose of the Housing Assessment Team:

- (1) HAT's basic function is to see that property in Bath that is unfit for habitation is brought up to the standard required by the 1957 Housing Act and its subsequent amendments.
- (2) There are usually a number of alternative ways that:
 - (a) necessary work can be financed and
 - (b) the 'conversion' itself can be carried out.

Although the Act itself provides the primary guidelines for action, other considerations need to be borne in mind viz:

- (a) The particular needs of existing inhabitants
- (b) The size of the City's housing stock e.g.
if a complete terrace of six houses is deemed to be unfit, considerable flexibility may exist as to how many housing units can be produced in the final scheme and how many bedrooms can be contained within each unit.
- (c) The planned future for the area in which the property lies. If a particular zone has been set aside for light industrial development, then this may well affect the way in which HAT deals with the future of housing units standing within that zone. (J also commented that in the City of Bath and its environs there are many examples of 'mixed development' e.g. short terraces of 'artisan' housing tucked in behind factories, or light industrial workshops standing in ostensibly residential areas.)
- (d) The aesthetics of the area in which the property stands and of the property itself as a building.
- (e) The cost of the various alternatives, bearing in mind the total 'economic' cost to the community and the actual cost to

the council itself, including consideration of any rehousing that may be necessary, either temporary or permanent.

J appears to see the appropriate Housing Acts as providing the core 'purpose' of the team (i.e. item (1) above) and that within any flexibility allowed by the Act, or by money available, or wherever there is a non-financially-dependent choice between ways of doing things, then the considerations summarised in (2) should be satisfied as far as possible.

Further discussion with J revealed that he saw his professional concern and the concern of his department as resting primarily with (c) and (d). He later revealed that he had a particular personal interest in (d) and interpreted aesthetics to include a historical perspective i.e. he has an interest in maintaining properties which have about them 'significant' architectural singularities.

Although J was prepared to formulate a set of corporate objectives for the Housing Assessment Team, the institution with which he seems to identify is not HAT, not Local Government in general, not the City of Bath, but is rather the planning profession itself and the principles that he believes that it stands for. Planning provides his work identity and also some of

his 'extra-curricula' interests. He commented to me that:

"I'm a Planner first and foremost. It's always been what I wanted to do. I think it becomes more and more important as our society becomes more developed and complicated. It's difficult to say who the Planners are working for. The community as a whole I suppose. We're trying to fit in everyone's interests in the best possible way. An impossible task really."

J's reference to The Community is in some ways similar to R's concern with The City. These stated goals may, perhaps, be Utopian in Gross's sense, but they seem pervasive in what these two members have to say about their jobs.

In order to articulate ideas relating to collective purpose J, like R, refers back to a formal and authoritative source, the Housing Act. When he then starts to elaborate on this purpose he draws upon his own interpretation of the principles of his profession. His personal view of his job becomes blurred with a perhaps rather abstract sense of what HAT ought to be doing and his contribution to that.

4.3.3 D's statement of the objectives of HAT

(i) P and I provide a back-up service for the

Housing Assessment Team. The main purpose of HAT is to turn unfit housing into fit housing, fitness being determined by the Housing Acts. We advise on the financial implications of any schemes that are discussed.

(ii) Two other kinds of consideration have to be taken into account:

- (a) Structural practicalities: The Building Engineer, L, and his assistant, C, both members of HAT, give advice here on what can and cannot be done.
- (b) Planning: J and M advise on matters of planning and aesthetics.

So that D's initial statement of how he saw the 'purpose of the Housing Assessment Team' is comparatively short. His first point is both simple and macroscopic, simple in the sense that his formulation of the main purpose of HAT seems to be a readily understandable function, a summary of the outcome that he believes ought to result from the application of the team's resources to a particular initial state; macroscopic in the sense that he later reveals his understanding of this rather bald statement to incorporate some of the issues that R and J talked about straight away.

It is clearly vital to be able to differentiate between a respondent's understanding of a particular

issue and the articulated response that he makes to a question or a series of questions. J's style of replying to the questions that I put to him and the issues thereby raised was straight away discursive, divergent and cognisant of complexity. A question asked by me was usually opened up by him into a number of other questions which were then discussed as questions and sometimes left as questions. D's style, on the other hand, was first of all more reserved but also inclined towards closure. He would listen to my questions and respond with 'an answer'. Nevertheless D's later performance at team meetings suggested that his conception of the work of the team was as subtle as J's, which belied the impression he gave at my early interviews.

4.3.4 Synthesising Corporate Purpose

We move on now to compare and contrast these three statements and attempt to construe the basis of a team objective, at least in so far as it might be understood by these significant contributors.

The major similarity between these statements appears in the reiteration of the almost text-book-like formulation of a corporate function which identifies property which is unfit as living accommodation and makes sure that it is turned into housing of a standard laid down by the relevant Housing Act. Yet there are

even differences between R's, J's and D's initial statements in this respect. R prefaces his recognition of this basic function with a recognition of an administrative task for which he, in fact, is responsible; namely monitoring the housing stock in Bath, maintaining a Housing Assessment List, adding to it as properties are discovered to be unfit for habitation or become unfit for one reason or another, and striking off properties which have been renovated either because of HAT's activities or for any other reason. Neither J nor D refer to this function, since they only become aware of problem properties when these are presented by R as items on the agenda of team meetings.

Both R and D ostensibly share the assumption that unfit housing will be turned into corresponding fit housing, and it is only J who initially articulates the possibility of changes in the overall housing stock i.e. that unfit housing units may be demolished and thus removed from stock or that the capacity of unfit properties may be increased at the same time as they are renovated. It is particularly interesting that it is J, the planner, who first raises the issue of demolition since he also holds that there should be a general presumption in favour of restoration.

R, as co-ordinator of the team, seems himself to

operate with a presumption in favour of retention. His track-record as one concerned with the housing situation in Bath would probably not be regarded as satisfactory if he were to be associated with a continuing net decline in the housing stock. But it is also part of his interpretation of HAT's brief that the stock should gradually be building up over time.

D articulates the unfit to fit conversion function as the basis of the Housing Assessment Team's work, but tends to set himself aside from this primary function, casting himself in the role of specialist advisor to those who have the principal responsibility. This is part of D's personal style. He often prefers to avoid responsibility for events. So that on the few occasions when HAT attracted criticism from either the Housing Committee or from the press D appeared able to conceptually separate himself from this, on such occasions almost alluding to the team in the third person, although he is a full member of it.

D's distancing from HAT can perhaps be seen in terms of his viewing the team as an 'inefficient' sub-bureaucracy with its own formal rules, objectives, and limitations. It is almost as if D believes that the given structure of the team can never achieve

the 'right' sort of results by virtue of the fact that it is, per se, an institution. A particular comment that he made to me, as an aside from our discussion about objectives, seemed to support this idea:

"Trouble is, when you create a committee like HAT, it suddenly seems more difficult to get things done. When R was doing the job on his own, he used to ring me up from time to time and I'd give him an opinion, dig out some information and I even went on a couple of visits with him. He got what he wanted and it didn't take up much of my time. Now the thing is all formalised, we seem to spend hours talking round the point. And we've all got different ideas of what we're supposed to be doing."

It is D who is apt to highlight differences in members' views of the purpose of the team, whilst R and J tend to see HAT as relatively cohesive in this respect. Note that D is also the only one of the three who differentiates functionally between the various kinds of expertise to be found on the team - himself and his assistant as financial advisors, J and his assistant as planning specialists and the engineers L and C.

In their statements both R and J refer to the long-term aspects of the Housing Assessment Team's function.

R includes in his list the middle and long term housing requirements of the city and J alludes to 'the size of the City's housing stock', and 'the planned future for the area'. D, on the other hand, views HAT principally as a processor of current problems, rather than as a policy aware body concerned with strategy.

In the course of the series of HAT meetings relating to the Bedford Street case, each of these three members had quite distinct preoccupations. It will be remembered that HAT's official or bureaucratic interest in Bedford Street was with the terrace cottages which form the approach to the proposed development site. R, however, whenever he referred to the Bedford Street case, usually seemed to incorporate the whole of the debate and when he talked about 'resolving the Bedford Street case' he had in mind the whole complex of the development problem. Clearly it is almost impossible in thinking and talking about such a situation to try and attend to the various aspects piecemeal, but R's viewpoint always seemed to be that of the grand strategist, who had a wider interest than just the renovation of a few terraced cottages.

J was, perhaps rather surprisingly, almost entirely focused on the particular question of whether or not

the cottages, which were listed for preservation, would need to be demolished if the development went ahead. He was rarely heard to express an opinion about the block of flats themselves, which would have made a considerable visual and environmental impact to the surrounding area. The historical and finer architectural characteristics of the terrace, difficult for most people to appreciate, and in an obvious sense less noticeable, weighed more heavily on J's mind. In a sense, this tends to confuse our earlier model of J holding a housing improvement view of HAT's objectives and a broader planning view of his own as part of HAT.

D was largely unmoved by the Bedford Street case. He did not express a strong preference for either removing or retaining the terrace and neither did he pass a definitive judgement on the suitability of the proposed development for that area. His habit of distancing himself from the recommendations of the team was observed throughout this case. Some of this distance can possibly be explained by a particular model of professionalism which holds that Local Government Officers should make clear distinction between 'Politics' and 'professional advice'. Officers, it is often said, are there to advise the Politicians on specialist matters and should not involve themselves in Politics (which is usually written and spoken with a capital P). The Political contribution of officers to Local Government debate is an interesting

and complex issue, but it is not our concern here. However, the power of Local Government professionalisation may well be an important factor in D being able to say 'if this scheme, then these costs' or 'if these cottages are converted by the private sector then these costs, if by the public sector ...' and so on, in a seemingly detached and disinterested way.

This trait is one which R, J and D all exhibit when it comes to reporting to the Housing Committee. They each regard HAT as in business to make recommendations - the buck, in their eyes, stops with the politicians and not with them, although R as chairman is aware of the dangers of taking no stand at all.

4.3.5 Some Summary Conclusions on Collective Purpose

(i) Notions of collective purpose held and used by members of the Housing Assessment Team appear to be strongly related to individual bureaucratic interpretation of job roles. The senior members of HAT take their briefs from the organisation which they see above them; these directives come down not in any formal sense because no such objectives have been set out; the authority and ideas derive from E, who has responsibility for the team, and are backed by members' perceptions of the generally recognised aims of Local Government and its constituent professions.

(ii) Apart from the ties within the team caused by such more or less common purpose references, some members experience a sense of cohesion in the sense that HAT appears to constitute a kind of sub-bureaucracy in its own right, with sufficiently strongly absorbed institutional authority to lend it its own official status.

(iii) The bureaucratic ties that the members have with the team are further highlighted by the distinction that some of them draw between themselves the professionals and themselves in the role of members. This distance seems to contribute to the fact that the intensity of commitment and feeling at meetings is generally not high.

(iv) It is difficult to perceive any significant forces of self-interest that can operate within the structure of the Housing Assessment Team and the work that it carries out. All members of the team are jointly signatory to the final recommendations that it makes and, in this sense, the eventual consumer of these could be said to represent a 'common adversary' for them. Each member has some unique and valuable expertise that is apt to lend him some security within the group. No member appears to be more 'expert' in any of the fields than the officially recognised expert. There is no seniority gap between the three

significant contributors and so there are no pressures of discipline. Because each of these three is in any case attached to a different department, the question of fighting for promotion does not arise. In any case, as we have observed, promotion within Local Government at the levels of seniority we are dealing with here is not so much a function of achievement as of longevity.

The only dimension of self-interest which it seems possible to attribute to HAT members is perhaps that to do with the wish for each to appear competent at meetings and to make 'good', cogent, and professional contributions. Even so, the members know each other so well that the atmosphere within the meetings is relaxed enough for almost any kind of contribution to be made without reserve.

It appears that self-interest runs parallel with group or collective interest to the extent that members recognise that it is a good thing for all concerned if the business of HAT is conducted as quickly and pleasantly as possible. In that respect, there is a high level of co-operation amongst the members and a high level of mutual support at the meetings.

In the following chapter, we move on from considering

some of the various dimensions of purpose that may operate to determine the outcomes of group decision-making to look at some of the more elusive forces they derive from the processes of debate and discussion.

5 A LEADER-DRIVER MODEL FOR GROUP 'DECISION-MAKING'

5.1 Introduction

We examine here a Housing Assessment case in which a particular member of HAT was predominant in moving the discussions, not altogether intentionally, towards the final outcome. We discuss and discount the utility of an explanatory model based upon notions of strategy and postulate a much more passive context for the 'decision-making', a context characterised by routine-ness, where ennui is never far away; a context in which the moods of the day and the chance run of discussion may have more impact than anything else upon what finally happens.

5.2 A Summary Case Study

This case concerns a series of Housing Assessment Team discussions about the future of a collection of properties known as Rock Cottages, which are situated within an old disused quarry at Combe Down, a small suburb of Bath.

In May 1978, two unoccupied houses on this rambling site came to the attention of R, co-ordinator of the Housing Assessment Team. One of these houses was in a particularly precarious structural position as it backed directly onto the old quarry face at the north end of the ground. This face was steadily crumbling

and slipping away and, hence, threatening the north wall of the cottage. Both this property and the one adjoining it were in a generally poor state of repair. They were also suffering from the damp that from time to time seeped down the quarry face from the field above.

The owner of both the empty cottages was resident in the Midlands and had inherited them several years ago as part of a relative's estate. R had been in touch with the owner, Mrs. Y, over a period of months, in an attempt to come to some agreement about putting the cottages into habitable order. She appeared to have no real interest in them however. Although she seemed to regard the cottages as a long-term investment and wanted to retain ownership, she was either unwilling or unable to spend the money necessary for their maintenance.

The owner-occupier of the larger of the two sound houses, Mr P, was a retired market gardener, and the greater part of his strip of land was cultivated with fruit and vegetables. There was always an air of busyness about his corner of the quarry, a small farmland oasis flourishing in the heart of suburbia. Mr. P originally wanted to buy one of the empty cottages and convert it into accommodation for his daughter, a recent widow. But he was now beginning

to think that they had been too far neglected to be a good buy.

The owner of the second of these two sound semis, a plumber, was more or less retired, although he still did occasional jobs to keep himself occupied and supplement his pension. He lived alone. His house was well kept, the garden tidy. He and Mr P would pass the time of day amicably, chatting across the fence.

Separated from the two sets of semi-detached cottages was a detached house standing in its own walled square of land. This was occupied by its owner, an old woman now well into her eighties, and her three large red setter dogs. She had, until recently, managed to keep her house in good decorative order, but her health was beginning to fail, the outside of the house was gradually looking more derelict week by week and the grounds were slowly becoming over-run with weeds.

The quarry site on which all these properties stood was large, about two hundred yards by a hundred yards. More than one builder has considered the possibility of developing the site with readily marketable 'town' houses. Access to the site was good and the land itself firmly founded upon a rocky base. At the time of the HAT discussions, however, much of the site had

run to grass and the existing properties had a pleasant rural if somewhat neglected outlook, with a better view and more breathing space than the occupants of the recently developed and expensive estate behind the quarry.

I first visited the quarry myself one evening in early summer. R and I had been talking at his office during the afternoon, running over the events of the last HAT meeting. This had been a rather extraordinary gathering, notable for an unusually intense and far-ranging discussion on the purpose of and constraints imposed upon environmental planning and development by Local Government. M, from the planning department, had been standing in as senior representative for J, who was on holiday somewhere in Cornwall. M is a Canadian in his mid-thirties, an enthusiastic, indeed almost fanatical conservationist of anything 'natural', 'traditional' and 'rustic'. He will argue fervently and sometimes eloquently in support of such diverse institutions as vintage cars, country churches, cottage industry and real ales brewed in the wood.

D, the Estates Management member of HAT, is rather inclined to go along with M's general outlook, although he has no great affinity for vintage cars, but he does at the same time regard himself as a realist. "You

cannot ignore the economic facts of life," he is apt to say. "Efficiency must be attended to if we want to make any kind of material progress." M's new five-door hatch-back, he pointed out, was not exactly hewn by dedicated craftsmen who were keenly in tune with their working environment. Neither, he argued, were these people particularly concerned that the foaming sleeves of keg bitter that were no doubt served in the cavernous pub outside their factory gates, had started life an optimum number of weeks ago in huge vats of stainless steel.

"It is all a compromise" asserted R, "A balance between what we would like and what we can actually have." Compromise seems to be one of his key operating concepts. He is admirably suited to the task of co-ordinating the activities of the Housing Assessment Team. Balanced, reasonable, yet willing to put forward a point of view if the situation demands, he pulls in contributions from the other members and weaves them into recommendations for action. Sensible, piecemeal progress from an unsatisfactory state into something a bit better. He lives his life and does his job according to this incrementalist doctrine.

L, one of the Building Surveyors, is more pessimistic. "There is nothing much we can do in any case. Events sort themselves out in the end. Local Government

doesn't actually achieve very much in itself, it is just there, and it's large enough to make some people take account of its presence in what they do in the world outside."

And so it went on. Rock Cottages had been the starting point for this discussion. They were just number 3 on the agenda; two of the houses were unoccupied, one of these decaying fast, and what was to be done about them? R reported his correspondence to date with their owner, Mrs Y, and his attempts to persuade her to do something to make the properties habitable. Mrs Y was obviously playing a stonewall innings and each of her letters had picked up and expanded a detail of R's last, but drawn no conclusions. Between them they had built up a considerable file of material which had nevertheless had no effect at all upon the state of affairs that R wished to change.

Then D had said:

"Well they're not particularly interesting houses anyway. That quarry is a bit of a backwater."

M had then leapt to the defence of the cottages and the quarry itself, and started to argue about the preservation of living communities, saying that this was what planning was all about.

We never actually reached agenda item 4. R arranged another meeting for the following week and the group disbanded. R and I walked back to his office, stopping off on the way for the customary beer and sandwich. Over lunch and into the afternoon I asked him about what he thought of the various members' attitudes to their jobs and their views about planning, conservation and housing assessment. He made one particular comment that, as I reflected upon it much later, seemed to help explain the eventual direction and outcome of this particular case:

"For most of us, most of the time, it is just a job - middle of the road, poorly paid really, but fairly respectable and pleasant enough from a day to day point of view. It's not exciting, in fact most of the detail is rather boring, but from time to time you get a case which seems more real somehow than most. It seems to click with the sort of person you are. Do you remember when J was so enthusiastic about that tumble-down house out at Ashley? That is the sort of place that he would like to own and do up and so it interested him particularly. It was the same with M this morning. He just felt a sympathy with the people living out at Rock Cottages, with the atmosphere of the place and so on."

I left R towards the end of the afternoon and took a

bus up to the quarry to look at the place for myself. I alighted in the middle of a small shopping street which was like dozens of others in the area - a couple of model banks, a 'family' butcher, diminutive supermarket, chemist, tobacconist and paper shop. We had just travelled up from the city through two miles of similar, unremarkable suburb. Neither really town nor village, not built up yet hardly verdant either, neither personal nor impersonal, friendly or unfriendly, but each of these pockets of the community was known in some depth, no doubt, to those that lived and grew older there, year upon year.

I was directed to the quarry itself by the bus driver and was surprised to find that it was only fifty yards or so from the bus stop. An unmade track ran in between the bank and a large detached house, and I followed it away from the main street. The track curved round behind a group of trees and then the quarry lay set out ahead of me. It was vaguely reminiscent of a wild west film set, a miniature canyon almost, with two pairs of cottages at the far end under the shelter of the rock face. A small pond lay between me and the villas, and two or three ducks were paddling, rather proprietorially, round in circles. A larger four square house stood within a walled piece of ground to the right and I could see two large dogs lying in the long grass. To the left,

a shallow incline covered with scrub was topped by some aged pine trees that creaked heavily in the freshening wind. The quarry itself was quite sheltered, however, and the evening sun was warm.

In front of the most lived-in looking cottage a man of about seventy was digging over a strip of garden with practised efficiency. I ambled in his direction. He looked up as I approached and nodded.

"Lot of visitors about this afternoon."

A broad Bristol accent, as if in parody of a rural encounter over work on the land, like a scene from the Archers.

"You're from the Council too, I suppose."

I disclaimed and asked who else had been disturbing him.

"Chap from the planning department was here after lunch. American too."

He obviously found these two ideas disjunctive.

"Nice fellow though," he compounded, although whether his visitor was nice in spite of his being a bureaucrat or from across the Atlantic it was difficult to say.

It sounded as though M had been out in the field too.

I asked the old man what the planning department had been interested in.

"Wanted to know whether I liked living here. Asked me where I would like to live if I ever moved. Told him I'd never thought about it, but that I'd been here

for thirty years and was quite settled."

I asked him then about the two empty cottages right next to the rock face. He said that these had been empty for the last two years or so and the owner lived up North somewhere. He didn't know what was going to happen to them but said that if they didn't have some work done to them pretty soon they'd be in a bad way.

"The damp from the cliff, that's the trouble. And a bit of slippage as well. That field up there wants draining properly really."

He pointed up to a piece of scrubland - field was rather a flattering designation - which apparently drained directly down the old quarry face onto the back of the two cottages.

"Hope they don't fall down altogether. Might get the developers in if that happens. One or two of 'em have been interested in this bit of ground for a long while. You could get quite a few modern-sized houses in here you see."

I supposed that you could, but agreed that that would change the character of the whole place for the worse.

I admired his garden, mostly of vegetables, which was laid out in a highly organised and methodical way. We exchanged weather forecasts for the coming summer and

I took my leave.

At the next meeting, the subject of Rock Cottages was once again on the agenda. R floated a proposal to encourage private development. "We are aware," he pointed out, "that one or two builders have shown interest in the site in the past. It is a substantial area and could support ten or a dozen modern semis or lines of town houses. The council does own part of the land anyway and might be prepared to give planning permission for a suitable scheme. We could also put any prospective developer in touch with the owner of the two cottages, who might then be prepared to sell out."

M was highly critical of the idea:

"That would be a monstrous thing to do. The whole character of the place would be lost. We're not just in the business of providing housing units you know. That quarry is an amazingly peaceful place to live in. I was up there the other day. Think about the people who are living there already. It would turn their world upside down."

D chimed in and said that from the Council's and indeed from HAT's point of view, to have the site built upon by a private developer would be a highly efficient

outcome. No council finance would be involved, the number of housing units in the area would be increased and the site would be tidied up from its present rather delapidated state to something more in keeping with a residential area. In the process, he said, the drainage from the scrub-land above the quarry could be properly provided for.

M reacted strongly against the idea of 'tidying up'. He argued that tidyness was a much overworked idea in planning and not one which HAT ought slavishly to pursue. R took a certain exception to this and pointed out that, to a large extent, they were in exactly the business of 'tidying up' properties that had been allowed to become run down.

"But I agree that tidyness shouldn't necessarily extend to how a development is laid out. I must admit I can see pros and cons for both arguments. Something has got to be done about those two empty cottages though. Somehow we've got to get Mrs Y to do the work, or get her to sell them to someone who will."

"They're not particularly marketable," said D. "No private buyer who would want to live there would be able to afford to pay what Mrs Y would want, and anyone who could afford it wouldn't really want to live there."

"It's difficult to imagine who would ever live there," R agreed. "The only people who seem to fit are those who have always been there. It would be quite a good place for a largish family. There's quite a bit of ground to spread around in."

"That's just the sort of place it is." This from an enthusiastic M. "If you do have to live in a built-up suburb at all, what better surroundings to have kids playing about in."

This discussion on Rock Cottages continued in this vein for a while and eventually ended with M volunteering to ring Mrs Y and talk with her himself about what ought to be done. I went to see M myself a couple of days later. He had not yet been able to contact Mrs Y. I asked him what he thought about the Rock Cottages case.

"It's quite a fun spot, that quarry." His Canadian drawl lent a certain cinematic drama to the line. "It would be a pity if it was all built over. We ought to take care of little pockets of quaintness like that."

What did he think about using the land to supply much-needed housing units?

"They're not much-needed actually, not now anyway,

and certainly not in the middle of the market. The pressure for new housing has been slowing down for several months, except right at the bottom end. We still have a lot of sub-standard housing in Bath, and people needing basic homes, but we couldn't use the quarry to help that situation. Any developer would be looking to build smartish commuter houses. That's what he could sell."

That all sounded reasonable enough and it more or less tied in with R's recent statistics, some of which he had been showing me the other day.

"This is one of those situations where there isn't much scope for action anyway," M went on. "When I get through to Mrs Y, I shall suggest to her that, whether she wants to sell the properties or to maintain them as assets, she will have to carry out repairs to the back of the houses and to the roof, at the very least. She could do all that on a modest bank loan easily securable. That loan could then be serviced by short-term lets. The houses would be maintained in good order, would be self-financing, and she could get them back at relatively short notice."

If Mrs. Y was to accept that line of argument from M, the case would soon draw to a close. I suggested to M that the circumstances were not actually all that

complicated:

"It's amazing what feeling those meetings can generate at the time though. The issues are small enough as you say, hardly affairs of state. Yet you can get carried away on a flow of expansive argument. I can anyway," he qualified with a grin, "But in the end, what actually happens is not very much, couldn't really be very much, and happens that way out of pure chance more often than not."

We nattered on for a while longer as I couldn't resist debating with him the idea of pure chance. Finally, he said that he should have something to report by the next meeting, and I left him to his business.

At the next meeting M reported that he had managed to telephone Mrs Y and have a long conversation about the houses. She had apparently been very uncertain about what she wanted to do with the properties and had left them empty more or less by default while she made up her mind. She had no great need of the capital at the moment and thought it a good idea in principle to hold onto the houses. At the same time she didn't want to spend much money on them. M outlined his own scheme, which gave her some flexibility of action in the medium term, and recommended a reliable local estate agent who could act as a

letting agent. Mrs Y had agreed that this was a good plan and she fixed up a date to travel down to Bath, meet R and M and discuss what work needed to be carried out. This meeting took place some weeks later and the work was put in hand shortly afterwards.

5.3 Some Leader-Driver Characteristics

The notion arising from this case that we are concerned to examine here is that a working group such as the Housing Assessment Team, particularly when it is dealing with issues which seem familiar and unexceptional, can easily be moved in sometimes apparently arbitrary directions if any one member adopts, for whatever reason, a singularly strong or convincing line of argument, or exhibits enthusiasm which is uncharacteristic.

At one level of analysis this is almost a commonplace. It is intuitively rather obvious and also well researched (e.g. Axelrod, 1976; Bales, 1953; Bass, 1949; Mangham, 1978; Lukes, 1975) that individuals who occupy positions of power within a group, or have strong oratory and reasoning skills, can push events in directions in which they would like them to move. What is less well researched is what happens in circumstances where there is a fairly even distribution of a low quantity of organisational power, where relatively well-rehearsed and familiar business

is being transacted and the majority of the members of the group have no great personal or organisational stake in the outcomes of the decision-making process.

In the course of the last twenty years or so there have been many styles of reaction to, first, the classical bureaucratic models of organisations such as were proposed and developed by Weber (op. cit.), and then later the various systemic views with their mapped-out hierarchies of interlocking and corporate goals (Selznick, 1948; Ashby, 1956; Emery and Trist, 1960; Simon, 1956).

In the Management Sciences, and particularly in O.D. and O.R., a counter school of thought has gradually become identifiable and associated with analyses of organisational politics. This school is founded upon what might be termed a 'real-life' view of organisations as ferments of political intrigue, where grand strategies are continually being planned and enacted, personal and departmental conflict is a way of life and paramount in most individuals' thinking is a desire to claw their way up the hierarchy or build up their empire by the quickest and cleverest means possible. Some recent representatives of this school have been Argyris and Schon (1974), Axelrod (1977), Brewer (1973), Eden (1978), Lerner (1976), Mangham (op. cit.), Mumford and Pettigrew (1975),

Perrow (1972), Pettigrew (1973), Radford (1977) and Zaleznik (1970).

Whilst we would agree that such politically oriented models of organisations are widely applicable and contribute important real-life dimensions that are lacking in bureaucratic and systems representations, nevertheless they do not account for all types of situation. An important characteristic of the content and procedure of the meetings of the Housing Assessment Team is routineness. The members know each other well, they are approximately contemporary and each is situated towards the centre of his available career hierarchy. They are men of modest ambition, doing a job for reasons which perhaps they can't really call to mind, having arrived where they are simply by following the path as it has appeared in front of them, rather as one might wander through a wood. Family men, bar one, with all the concerns and obligations that implies. Thankful enough for a job with relative security, a job which is white collar and respectable. Unfulfilled yet phlegmatic, sometimes annoyed by this or that bureaucratic restraint, yet working peaceably for the most part within close limits of power and discretion. Each has some expertise in one field or another, all are reserved about forming judgements and pronouncing opinions.

To understand more fully the outcomes determined by a team so compiled, it is necessary to take account of a kind of organisational ennui against which professional judgements are often made. That is not necessarily to imply high levels of cynicism and world-weariness, but rather to suggest that, commonly, energy will not be mobilised beyond a certain point to argue for and support with action organisational or professional causes.

It is possible to identify some important parameters relating to group meetings conducted within this kind of structure, parameters which become the more significant as the potential for the differential distribution of powers of reason and rhetoric is reduced. These may be labelled:

- critical elapsed sequences
- stock polarities and agreements
- discounted standpoints
- novel standpoints
- extraordinary commitment

and we now examine these ideas individually in the context of the meetings of the Housing Assessment Team.

(i) Critical Elapsed Sequences

These are essentially conceived as particular sequences

of contributions which of themselves give rise to particular other contributions, conclusion points or actions by contributors. This is a similar idea to the concept of Act to Act Tendencies proposed by Bales (1953), although he was principally concerned with the juxtaposition of classes of behaviour rather than with the content of strings of spoken contributions. It is possible to differentiate between powerful sequences of content and sequences in which the potential power is somehow diffused. D, for example, followed up R's suggestion of encouraging private development with his own thoughts on 'tidying up' the site. The two taken together form a kind of increasing gradient against which M reacts strongly. Had D made a point which essentially disagreed with R, the two taken together might have neutralised each other and M might not have put his own view so strongly or, indeed, might not have put it at all. The apposition and juxtaposition of contributions creates increased or decreased potential for new contributions. This is a similar idea to that of semantic determinism discussed elsewhere (Cumberlidge, 1978). It was argued then that the generation of text or dialogue may follow something like a Markovian process. That is to say, what has just been said determines a set of probabilities for what will be said next and that once a writer or speaker sets off from a particular starting point he quickly

builds up a structure which constrains and helps to shape the finished contribution.

Common examples of critical elapsed sequences occur when arguments escalate to hostility in the form of tempers lost, or when, conversely, humour builds upon humour and a particular line of discussion breaks down into laughter and flippancy. Part of the skill of managing meetings and conversations to some desired end probably lies in anticipating critical sequences and their likely effect and then attempting either to construct such sequences or to block them, depending upon how the consequences are valued.

If none of the contributors has any particularly strong or salient objectives, then the process becomes much more of a game of chance, where the Markovian probability distributions are relatively flat. It is a well known feeling to many committee men to have been involved in a collective decision that has emerged from nobody knows where.

(ii) Stock Polarities and Agreements

Where, as in the case of HAT, the members of a meeting are well known to each other, stock reactions to particular contributions may become accepted into the culture of the group. These commonly take the

form either of polarities or agreements. So that whenever D says, as he is apt, that "That doesn't make commercial sense," then J is likely to respond with something like "Our measures of profit and loss are not so clear cut here." These two ideas frequently come up in pairs and therefore tend to stand alone in the proceedings, effectively neutralising each other, forming a kind of standard diversion neither connected strongly to what has gone before nor forming a clear foundation for what is about to come; the main sequence of contributions tends to restart after the occurrence of stock polarities.

Stock agreements are common and well-recognised pairs of reinforcing contributions. When R, for example, confronted as chairman by a maze of uncertainties and conflicting objectives and opinions, reminds the meeting that "All we've got to do is to find a workable compromise," L will very often concur by saying "If we try and find the very best solution we shall probably be here all year. Let's just get something done." This is a familiar pair of contributions as well known as phrases in a popular melody.

Stock agreements can have the effect of raising the power of a line of argument to a strong climax, depending upon the mood of the meeting and what has gone before. Alternatively, by their very familiarity

and air of cliché, they can sap the force of otherwise strong rhetoric by introducing an awareness of déjà vu and banality.

(iii) Discounted Standpoints

We refer here to the occasions when stock contributions are made, however prompted, but are easily recognised as being hobby horses and hence regarded with indulgence and discounted as significant items of force in debate. Even if the line of reasoning is clear and sound, even if the rhetoric is powerful, discounting will take place if it is a repeat performance, and known as such.

One of L's favourite subjects is what he regards as the impotence of Local Government to effect fundamental changes in the provision of services, how it can only hope to work incrementally and painfully slowly on the status quo. Such was the tenor of his comment, quoted earlier from a meeting about Rock Cottages.

"Local Government doesn't actually achieve very much in itself, it is just there, and large enough to make some people take account of its presence in what they do."

Whenever L comes in with this theme, eyebrows are raised, everyone sits back in their chairs, D grins

and the proceedings come to a momentary halt. L is not providing a dramatic oratory climax, but quite simply an interlude during which members can sit back and relax, formulate their next point, write notes on the conclusions reached so far, or think about what they are going to do during the coming weekend.

(iv) Novel Standpoints

In apposition to the notion of a line of argument discounted by familiarity is the idea of a standpoint that has impact by virtue of its novelty and freshness. New ideas, new themes have an undeniable attraction for most people whose business is discussion and argument. M, for example, as a relatively recent HAT member and as a foreigner, clearly had some power of novelty in the series of meetings relating to the Rock Cottages case. He had the advantage of a new face and unknown personality, of an unfamiliar voice and style of argument, and of the somewhat radical stand he took on some of the issues in the case.

The value of novelty in a rather different context is affirmed by the research findings of Axelrod (1976) who studied in some depth a number of high-level, international, foreign policy meetings.

"The data refute a bombardment model of argumentation in which the participants support their own arguments

to make them resistant to attack, while attacking the weak spots in others' stated positions. In fact, there are few assertions which are supported by specific evidence, almost no mutually supported causal arguments, and the assertions which were attacked were no less emphasised than the assertions which were not attacked. More in accord with the data is the 'novel arguments' approach in which the key factor in persuasive argumentation is the development of arguments which others have not already taken into account."

But it seemed, in the course of Housing Assessment Team meetings, that the novelty did not serve exactly the same purpose that it did during Axelrod's high level foreign policy discussions. In the latter case the novelty appeared to indicate to the recipient of the argument that the speaker had obviously considered some aspects of the question that he himself had not. The recipient here is brought up short by the new argument, first of all because it strikes him as new, second because he may be doing a bit of fast thinking in order to follow the argument at all, third, perhaps, in order to work out how this new line relates to what he himself has said and, finally, to consider any further implications of the argument and to revalue his opinion of the speaker and his case.

Some of this may have been going on as M made his

contributions, bringing as he did new perspectives to bear upon the scene. But an equally important effect of the modest enough novelty here was simply to stir some life back into the proceedings and to move the meeting out of one of its characteristic ruts.

(v) Extraordinary Commitment

Genuine enthusiasm is invariably infectious. Not only does it tend to be uplifting of itself, but in a group it can also help to convince flagging spirits that the activity they are engaged upon is worthwhile undertaking and that it can be carried forward to a successful conclusion. There is indeed more likelihood, if there is an enthusiast present, that it will be.

Extraordinary commitment is also an asset to a group in a rather obvious way. Clearly someone who is prepared to do some ground-work and also take responsibility for initiating action, will push up the output of the collective as a whole. He or she may then, having started a move forward, be able to mobilise other members of the group who were not significant contributors previously, and who could not be until events started to occur and tasks become mapped out.

Extraordinary commitment is particularly striking in its effect when it occurs against a background of unexciting hackwork and routineness. It can also,

however, have an effect which is quite unintended by the person showing it, such as often happens when somebody joins a new job and shows an exaggerated keenness to become interested and involved in what his colleagues are doing. Their keenness can often get them carried away and they can find themselves involved with work that they'd rather not be doing, simply because their enthusiasm was taken at face value.

5.4. A Leader-Driver Model

What we are suggesting here then, as an explanatory model of some of the dynamics of HAT meetings, comprises two distinct levels of analysis. First, it seems important to underline the broad nature of the relationship that the members have with their organisation as a whole and with the housing assessment team in particular. Then, within that framework, we have identified certain parameters that have to do with the way in which the observed content of meetings unfolds.

We touched earlier upon the question of the authenticity of models of organisational politics in the context of the routine and humdrum. This point requires some elaboration.

Pettigrew (1973, 1977) has been particularly concerned

with the reasons underlying political behaviour in companies and the extent to which individuals attempt to lead affairs in a selected direction in order to further their own ends.

Mumford and Pettigrew (1975) have noted:

"We would stress the importance of individual goals in decision-making behaviour. It is not always recognised that the desire of individuals to increase or maintain their power position may have as much influence on the decision-making process as departmental or other subunit goals ...

... Politics can be seen as one of the mechanisms by which individuals and groups seek to obtain power over others. They do this in order to secure some advantages which they believe will assist the achievement of personal and group goals."

Implicit in Pettigrew's view of politics here are, first, the existence of individual goals which are more or less clearly defined, or at least recognisable when choices have to be made, and second an assumption that these can be pursued fruitfully at the place of work, and, more specifically, within an organisation.

Burns (1965) also has some views on political behaviour.

"The notion either of a hierarchy of sub-goals which, although generated within, and by the existence of, the organisation, wander out of line so far as organisational goals are concerned, or of an organisational goal generated by the consensus reached by individuals, each with personal goals, bargaining and learning their way towards a satisfactory equilibrium between their goals and those of the working community can itself only be realised and made operational if we accept the fact that the organisation represents only one of several means - and systems for realising the goals of the individual."

Burns has a somewhat different emphasis to that of Mumford and Pettigrew. He is essentially saying that individuals have personal commitments, some of which may be realised through the membership of an organisation. Mumford and Pettigrew are rather suggesting that within a given organisational framework, individuals are apt to have strong career commitments that bear heavily upon any decision-making processes to which they are party.

Pettigrew draws a distinction too between political and non-political behaviour and tends to make implicitly a rather complex ethical judgement about the former. That is to say, at the same time as regarding the pursuit of power as being in some sense not really

quite proper, he also seems rather to relish it as 'real life', the true stuff of organisations. This is partly witnessed by his quotation from Bannester (1969):

"It is immaterial who owns the gun and is licensed to carry it; the question is, who has his finger on the trigger?"

This conception of strategy and politics, whilst possibly having some applicability for understanding individual HAT members' dealings with their own departments, is not considered to provide an authentic model of the workings of the Housing Assessment Team itself, for a number of important reasons:

- (a) HAT is essentially an interdepartmental working group which has the most loosely defined lines of reporting. Suggested originally by a previous Chief Executive, the function was at first carried out by R alone. R's present senior, the Director of Environmental Health, later proposed that representatives from the various other departments be brought in and the function run on a committee basis. This idea was approved by the various Heads of Department and 'volunteers' were appointed. So HAT was started more or less

because 'it seemed a good idea at the time.' It undoubtedly serves and is also believed to serve a useful function and it uses relatively little in the way of resources; but its results are of a piecemeal and undramatic kind, not the sorts of material from which dynamic career progressions are made. The members are aware of this and regard HAT business as just another part of the job, and something of a change from their particular departmental affairs, and to be conducted as quickly and pleasantly as possible.

- (b) There is a clearly discernible culture amongst the foot soldiers of Local Government in Bath which is somehow 'anti-political'. That is not to say that individual officers show no concern for their own career progressions, but rather that there exists a strong ethos of 'playing a straight bat' within the organisation, which naturally attenuates competitive strategy in Pettigrew's sense.
- (c) There are implicit but strong rules of precedence which govern the career progressions of Local Government Officers, and these curtail the advantages to be gained from competitive strategy. That is to say, there is little enough scope for an officer to improve his career position by

dramatic action. The opportunities for dramatic action are themselves few and far between and in any case the impact would have to be very considerable for it to outweigh the prevailing corporate sense of when it was appropriate to promote.

The situation changes, it is true, among the upper echelons of the paid officers. The jockeying for position and competition for resources is marked at Director level and the battle for power a major pre-occupation. Here, Pettigrew's political model has much salience.

"... the power distribution within an organisation at any one moment will be an important factor in determining who shall gain a disproportionate share in new resources as they become available." (Mumford and Pettigrew, op.cit.)

But the Housing Assessment Team members do not touch this world. They have little discretion; they are receivers not writers of memoranda.

In thinking about what we have labelled the Leader-Driver model, we have used the term leader in rather a singular way, much in the same sense that it is used in the phrase 'lead astray'; that is, to connote

a state of affairs in which there are not great a priori forces to push events in any particular direction and therefore the moods and preoccupations of the day that members bring to the meetings and the order in which contributions happen to be made are significant determinants of the final outcome. This formulation is at odds with models that pay great attention to strategy and also those that would view the process as being essentially driven by a sense of public service and professional responsibility.

We are underlining here an essential indeterminacy surrounding the outcomes of the deliberations of working groups such as the Housing Assessment Team; groups whose business is characterised by discussion that searches for a workable solution to what has been broadly defined, by the team or by somebody else, as a problem area.

The problems here are typically not complex structurally. A particular housing unit (or group of units) fails to meet the minimum standards for habitation laid down in the Housing Acts and represents, therefore, a waste in the use of resources, in a total community sense. The team is charged with the job of engineering an improved use of resources and the restoration of the housing unit to a working standard.

Often, what needs physically to be done is hardly a matter for debate. The question is usually one of financing - who is to pay for what and how. Sometimes, though, a number of possible schemes are proposed. The alternatives that come up for discussion in the course of the Rock Cottages case were renovation by the owner, purchase and renovation by the Council, purchase and either renovation or demolition and development by a private contractor. Only the first and the last of these options was considered seriously as the Council budget for property improvement was small and likely to get smaller. Wherever possible HAT was instructed to act as facilitator for external financing.

Either of the remaining schemes could have been the outcome. An important reason for the final result was a particularly strong stand taken by a relatively new member of the group who also took some initiative in facilitating action.

This stand was partly due to a belief in certain principles, but it was also the result of a debating reaction to other contributions in the meeting. There is a sense in which what finally happened was "nothing but words" that became transformed into action.

Part of the power of such words derives, we have argued, from the background of routineness and familiarity which characterises the team's business. Against this background events, contributors or contributions of novelty can generate unaccustomed interest and lead decision making away in a particular direction.

Even outside the team, Mrs Y was galvanised into some sort of action by M's personal attention and common sense suggestions. She probably would have continued to reply to R's rather official letters for months without coming to any decision about what to do with the house, but an enthusiastic Canadian at the other end of the line was something that she could more easily respond to.

Bruner (1979) has looked at some of the implications of regarding decision-making as discourse.

"... the making of decisions must be regarded not only as an individual intrapsychic process but also as a way of communicating something in a social context ... decision theory tends to concentrate upon those cognitive processes that operate in the mind of a detached speaker to guide him to a well-formed performance: knowing the alternatives, knowing their estimated values and likelihoods, knowing the kinds of pay off matrices that govern choice, being able

to make Bayesian transformations of empirical probabilities, etc. But I wish to argue that a social or political decision is not made with these rational considerations as sole or even primary considerations. Rather, it is made as a vehicle for carrying out the intentions of those empowered to make the decision, and the process of reaching a decision among those involved is more like a conversation than like the rational calculus. It usually results from the interaction of a set of speech acts."

We would go further than this in suggesting that it is possible also to over-emphasise the significance of intentions. Mrs Y herself didn't appear to have any strong intentions, just a once articulated preference for keeping the cottages if possible but for not spending much money on them either. We are suggesting that our leader in this model in a sense doesn't really exist. He or it could have turned up at any time to swing events away in any direction.

6 A PERSONAL INTEREST MODEL OF GROUP DECISION MAKING

6.1 Introduction

The analysis contained within this chapter examines the hypothesis that individuals participating in a collective decision-making process will be primarily concerned with furthering their own interests, however they define them, rather than with pursuing for the group whatever they might regard as the objectives of the group. Arising from this assumption is the notion that the outcome or outcomes of a collective decision-making process can be regarded as a complex function of the personal interests of the group members.

We illustrate this model with reference to a Housing Assessment Team case which involved a public inquiry. The fact of having to give formal evidence and to account officially for their points of view, threw into highlight some of the individual interests of R, the co-ordinator of HAT, and E, the Director of Department to whom R is responsible. The events of the case itself are of secondary concern here, but are relevant in that they provided a stimulus and backdrop for discussions that I was able to have with R and E about how they perceived their involvement with HAT.

We first summarise the events of the case and then present an analysis of the personal interests that gradually emerged in the course of the discussions. Finally, we draw some conclusions about the utility of adopting such a perspective and suggest aspects of collective decision-making that can be highlighted but, also, that can be missed in the process.

6.2 A Summary Case History

The case described here centres upon the future of a terrace of ten, three-storey, 18th century, 'artisan' cottages and an adjoining terrace of two cottages which date from the early 19th century. All these properties lie within what is known as the Bath Conservation Area and also the Widcombe Priority Area. One of these cottages was included in the List of Buildings of Special Architectural and Historic Interest issued in August 1973, and two others were 'spot-listed' in a Department of the Environment inspection carried out in January 1973. These cottages became the subject of a public inquiry that was set up when the County of Avon applied for listed building consent to demolish them in order to accommodate a road-widening scheme. An extract from the evidence presented to the inquiry by S, the Assistant County Surveyor, serves to sketch in some background to this proposal:

"In February 1968, Circular 1/68 issued by the then Minister of Transport, asked urban authorities to prepare traffic and transport plans showing how they intended to relate their traffic and parking policies to available road capacities and to immediate and longer term policy objectives. The plans were used as a background for consideration of investment and grant applications.

"The Bath Traffic and Transport Plan was substantially based on the Buchanan Planning and Transport Study published in 1965 and was inherited by the County Council on the reorganisation of Local Government in 1974."

This plan contained the proposals to widen the road on which the aforementioned cottages stood. These proposals involved demolishing the cottages and, in accordance with established procedure, the advice of what was then the Medical Officer of Health was sought. S's statement continued:

"In December 1970 the City Council received and accepted the official representation of the Medical Officer of Health concerning (the cottages), that:

- (a) the houses in the area were unfit for human habitation

(b) the most satisfactory method of dealing with the conditions in the area was the demolition of all the buildings ...

"The City Council accordingly declared a Clearance Area and made a Compulsory Purchase Order under the Housing Acts which was submitted to the Secretary of State for confirmation. At the same time as the Compulsory Purchase Order was made a Statement of Reasons was served on all owners. The reasons were all related to the proposed widening scheme that had crystallised in the Traffic and Transport Plan and the opportunity was taken by the City Council to prescribe a detailed road widening line. In order to implement the widening it was necessary to acquire and demolish all the properties in the Compulsory Purchase Order. No objections were made to the Compulsory Purchase Order and it was confirmed by the Secretary of State in 1971.

"After inheriting the scheme from the City Council, the County Council reviewed the proposals and resolved to pursue the road widening scheme and it is the formal application for Listed Building consent to demolish, that has led to this public inquiry."

A public inquiry is almost always necessary before consent can be given to demolish listed buildings.

In opposition to this particular application, made by the Avon County Council, is the conservation lobby who argue that the historical associations and architectural characteristics of the cottages make them worth preserving, even at the cost of some inconvenience to road-users. The County Planning Officer for Avon made the following observations in his evidence to the public inquiry:

"In addition to the documentary evidence available to support the historical associations of the cottages with John Wood and his employer Ralph Allen, the architectural features of the design reinforce the impression that the cottages were consciously designed to create an impression of dignity and solidity appropriate to their location at the entrance to Ralph Allen's private carriage road ...

"The cottages are unusual for their date in that while intended as 'artisan housing' they are designed to a high standard incorporating architectural features not normally found in such housing, and are extremely well-built. The ten cottages Nos 6-24, are linked visually in pairs by the grouping of doors and windows so that there is a more stately rhythm to the elevation than would be achieved by identical placing of doors and windows in each elevation. The upper storeys are dignified by pilasters rising through two storeys

on the line of the party walls, and by the massive chimneys and raked copings. The door hoods and brackets, and the band course and cornice are well detailed. These features combine to indicate that the buildings were considered to be something of an architectural and sociological 'show-piece' by their owner and architect.

"Other extant examples of artisan housing of the 18th and 19th century date in Bath do not possess similar architectural features or comparable homogeneity of design, nor do any surviving on a similar scale retain their original features to the same extent."

The main point of interest in this case, as it relates to our analysis of the Housing Assessment Team, is that the City Council, who were originally party to proposing the road-widening scheme and who instituted the compulsory purchase order on the cottages, are now, after reorganisation, defending the retention of the terrace on conservation grounds. In this they are supported by the Bath Preservation Trust and the Bath Society. It is true that the Buchanan Study predicted a significant increase in traffic flow along the road on which the cottages stand, which has not taken place because a proposed development of the Admiralty premises nearby at Foxhill was subsequently shelved. It is also, presumably,

perfectly reasonable for Council policy and priorities on conservation, traffic and housing to change with passage of time. The Housing Assessment Team was itself set up in the period between the original Compulsory Purchase Order and the current public inquiry and brought with it new ways of evaluating housing potential. Nevertheless, the apparent turnaround generated some strong feeling and, incidentally, gave rise to some interesting data relevant to the personal interest analysis that we now go on to discuss.

6.3 An Analysis of Personal Interests

There are a number of key individuals concerned with this case who could have been singled out for consideration in an analysis of personal interests. For example:

- (a) L, County Engineer and Surveyor and Head of the Department of Highways and Engineering, County of Avon.
- (b) S, the Assistant County Surveyor who has in the past carried out a considerable amount of work in measuring and elaborately analysing the traffic flows in the road network adjacent to the cottages.
- (c) B, a leading member of the Bath Society, himself a practising architect.

- (d) D, managing director of the M Construction Company, who has drawn up a scheme for the conversion of the terraces into two and three bedroomed units particularly suitable for first-time buyers.
- (e) E, the now Director of Environmental Health for the City Council, who as Medical Officer of Health recommended the demolition of the cottages in 1970 and is now maintaining that they could and ought to be preserved.
- (f) R, co-ordinator of the Housing Assessment Team, responsible to E, and at the time of this case very much concerned with demonstrating the success of HAT as a mechanism for saving housing units that would otherwise have been lost.

We shall restrict discussion to those directly concerned with the Housing Assessment Team and concentrate here upon R, the co-ordinator of HAT, and E, the Director of Environmental Health to whom R reports.

In trying to understand the meaning and causes of any social action, particularly that which occurs within organisations, with reference to the concept of interests, it is important to construe the notion widely enough to take account of more than merely selfish behaviour on the part of the actors concerned. Parsons (1960) has referred to this point in considering

the variety of causes that may lie behind directed action:

"I do not think it is useful to postulate a deep dichotomy between theories which give importance to beliefs and values on the one hand, to allegedly 'realistic' interests, e.g. economic, on the other. Beliefs and values are actualised, partially and imperfectly, in realistic situations of social interaction and the outcomes are always codetermined by the values and the realistic exigencies; conversely what on concrete levels are called 'interests' are by no means independent of the values which have been institutionalised in the relevant groups. Thus churches have 'interests' just as definitely as do business firms or trade unions though of course the content is different."

So that within the context of an organisation, personal interests commonly have an organisational reference. Although entirely external interests may often be important and significant in determining behaviour, they usually represent only a sub-set of that which is of concern to the individual. It is also useful to differentiate between means and ends, so that we may attempt to make some judgement about when to stop probing behind what people tell us. Maslow (1954) has observed that:

"If we examine carefully the average desires that we have in daily life, we find that they have at least one important characteristic, i.e. that they are usually means to an end rather than ends in themselves. We want money so that we may have an automobile. In turn we want an automobile because the neighbours have one and we do not wish to feel inferior to them, so that we can retain our own self-respect and so that we can be loved and respected by others. Usually when a conscious desire is analysed we find that we can go behind it, so to speak, to other, more fundamental aims of the individual."

Interests, aims, values, desires; it is not our intention here to become embroiled in the exclusive definitions of overlapping concepts. We are using the term Personal Interest in this chapter to represent either end states or more intermediary means that have salience for an individual and therefore give rise to purposive behaviour when he is faced with situations of choice.

(i) R: Some Dimensions of Personal Interest

R has been co-ordinator of HAT since the team was set up in 1975. The formation of this team, and indeed of many similar teams in Local Government, followed upon the reorganisation of 1974 and the then current trend towards what has been broadly

labelled corporate management thinking. Interdisciplinarity was a key idea at that time and HAT was conceived very much in those terms, its members having diverse backgrounds in planning, surveying, architecture, estate agency, costing and environmental health. R, then a Senior Inspector of Environmental Health, found himself caught up in this new interdisciplinary thinking and was given the task of acting as chairman and administrator for the Housing Assessment Team. He threw himself into his new job with enthusiasm, initiated an extensive survey of property in the City and ended up with a long list of 'marginal' houses, that is, houses that are considered by the official standards for environmental health to be unfit or almost unfit for habitation and which will need either to be brought up to standard, converted for non-residential use or else demolished.

The selection of actual team members was largely out of R's hands, although he was able to contribute some suggestions where two or more people appeared to qualify more or less equally for membership. He was, however, responsible to E for working out the modus operandi of the team, for deciding upon the procedures for meetings, the frequency of meetings, for drawing up the agendas and writing the minutes, for allocating executive, out-of-meeting work amongst members, and for the progress of this work against

the team's timetable.

The original proposals about HAT conceived the team as having a limited life, in that it was to be set up rather as an interdepartmental working party to carry out a particular task, and would disband when this task had been achieved. A review date was suggested and agreed, and was six weeks away at the time of the public inquiry. R was at that time in the course of preparing a review of HAT's work and was concerned to argue three main points therein:

- (a) That HAT had been instrumental in adding significantly to the City's housing stock and, at the same time, in helping to preserve its architectural heritage.
- (b) That, in achieving these objectives, it has managed to mobilise private sector finance to a large extent, by negotiating each case carefully with the interested parties and finding common interests between them and the team.
- (c) That there is a continuing need for this kind of work as ageing properties fall into disrepair and that HAT or something like it ought to be maintained on a permanent basis to deal with this need.

The timing of the public inquiry was rather apposite.

As R observed to me:

"Housing Assessment is normally pretty low-profile. Not many people are very clear what we do and some don't know that we exist. If we can make a good case at the inquiry and are seen to be taking a broad view of things, then we might get the team established on a permanent basis."

I asked him then whether that was something that he would like to happen.

"Oh, certainly. Apart from the fact that I'm a bit higher on the scale than I would otherwise be, it makes the work much more interesting. I get about a lot more than I ever used to."

During the course of a number of discussions I had with R about his position as co-ordinator of HAT, a number of personal objectives emerged which seem also to be, for him, important positive attributes of the job. These are as follows:

- (a) Increased job satisfaction; R seems to derive a considerable amount of interest and satisfaction from this position. He says that he enjoys being based in Bath, he gets on well with his colleagues and likes being able to 'get out of the office', visit properties and meet the public.

He finds the ambiance of his occupational status quo congenial and would not like it to change.

- (b) Increased chances of internal promotion; R believes that making a success out of HAT must improve his chances of promotion within his own department, not just as a direct result of the team's achievements being 'officially recognised', but also because as co-ordinator of the team he is able to move within a wider circle of potentially influential people, both Local Government officers and elected council members.
- (c) Increased job mobility; R considers that the experience accumulated during his association with the team will provide him with more career options if he ever decides to change his job. He sees the value of this experience as deriving both from the actual business of managing the team and from the fact that the work involves him in meeting people with a wide variety of backgrounds, expertise and seniority.
- (d) Increased organisational status; from that attaching to his normal Local Government grade of Senior Inspector of Environmental Health to the slightly higher status level afforded him on

account of the extra work, responsibility and acting seniority associated with being co-ordinator of HAT. This is status which, partly, he gives to himself but which seems to be reinforced by the reactions of the people that work with and around him.

- (e) Increased income; from the step up in grade that accompanies the position.

R apparently associates these occupational attributes with his job as viewed as a whole rather than linking them specifically with individual cases. However, particular cases seem to serve these interests to the extent that they either result in 'successful' outcomes, in R's terms, and/or are inherently interesting to him as pieces of working life. R found it difficult when asked to place these interests in an order of priority or to assign them any kind of importance weighting, but he did agree that the way that he views his working world is significantly affected by an important preoccupation which essentially seems to combine both job satisfaction and status. He articulated this as follows:

"It's good to feel as though you're achieving something and having an effect that people can recognise. I'm no more or less concerned about status really than anyone

else in this department, less than most probably, but I like to think that what I'm doing is being taken seriously by the people here and by the public outside."

We now examine these identified interests in greater detail and reflect upon some of the comments that R has made about each.

Job Satisfaction

R is by temperament lively and active. He likes things to be happening and likes to be busy himself. He is not a prevaricator and when faced with a list of jobs to do against a deadline, which he often is, he presses on and works his way steadily through them. He will ring someone now rather than wait until 'later on' - he will dictate a letter while he thinks of it, rather than piling work up in his 'in' tray. As regards the main business of the Housing Assessment Team, he prefers to see results in the short term rather than the longer term, to see some action taken which works rather than to prolong debate about alternatives. He is a kind of pragmatist, a seeker of quick compromise.

At the same time R does not take precipitate action before having thought implications through carefully and he also takes some satisfaction from contemplating the complexity of some of the cases that come his way. He is aware of and almost relishes conflicting criteria

and conflicting needs and he sees it as being the job of HAT to mediate sensibly and steer a 'middle course' between the requirements of different interested parties. In this connection, R has noted:

"When a HAT case comes up, the first thing we are normally trying to do is to maintain the housing stock level. This can happen in a variety of ways but there may be conflicts between us and the owners, or between owners and tenants or between co-owners who want to do different things with the property. Then there are conservationists who will have a different view again. Even on the team, there are differences between the members. J (the senior planning member) would sometimes be prepared to save houses that would cost a fortune to keep in a habitable condition, but then his business is the heritage of the city more than anything else. Sometimes I disagree with D. His background is in Estate Agency and he still tends to look at properties in terms of their open market potential. But I am mostly concerned with providing as many acceptable housing units as possible as economically as possible."

R is clearly operating with the assumption that the various parties in a case will, in general, have different starting points and views of the situation. But he regards that as part of the interest of his

job rather than as a 'complication' to the smooth running of things. He derives satisfaction from handling such cases and bringing them to some kind of successful conclusion. But this is a more 'intellectual' satisfaction than the immediate gratification that he appears to derive from action, from getting things done. The first might be said to be connected with his image of himself in his work setting. So that wherever he is, whatever he is doing, whether he is at work or not, he will be able to regard himself as someone who does this kind of job and who is concerned with these kinds of things. This is a more or less permanent picture of his work situation which he can 'take out' and look at anytime and gain some satisfaction from. It is almost a savouring of his position in the scheme of things. The second, shorter term, satisfaction is rather a Conative-Affective than a Cognitive phenomenon in Maslow's (op. cit.) terminology. It is associated with immediate taste, with more serious gratification than the more reflective pleasure to be obtained from appreciating a particular view of the world and one's place within it. R himself noted that:

"There's a difference between enjoying something during the day and then looking at the total picture from the comfort of your armchair in the evening."

Internal Promotion

R is not at the moment particularly keen to move away from the Bath/Bristol area, although he says that he would do so if an attractive job 'came up'. He is comfortably settled in his home, his wife is working at a job she enjoys and their two children are getting on well at the schools that they're attending. R would prefer to take promotion within the Bath City Council itself. He views HAT as possibly helping towards such a promotion because:

- (a) There is scope for the team itself to be developed as a permanent entity which requires management and resources i.e. as a modest example of empire building.
- (b) HAT, under R's guidance, can achieve some obviously beneficial results, and such success can itself be officially recognised and also noticed outside Local Government.
- (c) As co-ordinator of HAT, R gets the opportunity to move within a wider circle of potentially influential people - Local Government Officers, elected council members and influential members of the public e.g. local solicitors, chairmen of local groups, etc. who have personal connections with both the council members and the upper Local Government echelons.

(a) Empire Building

The Housing Assessment Team was established in 1975, following upon Local Government Reorganisation and the introduction of 'Corporate Management' practices. However, the Team was originally conceived as a short-term working party with a limited life set up to do a particular job of work. What has since become clear, over the period of its life however, is first that the original task of dealing with a list of marginal properties is taking longer than was then anticipated, but also that the list was capable of considerable extension even at the start and needed to be added to in any case as time progressed, more properties became marginal and therefore required attention. In order to maintain HAT as a going concern in the future, R has not only to demonstrate this last point but also that he is achieving successes with the original list. It is partly for this reason, as well as for the reasons of job satisfaction mentioned earlier, that R likes to 'press on' and bring cases to an early and satisfactory conclusion. To be seen to be achieving results is of some importance if HAT is to be kept on the road with R in the chair. He commented that:

"I suppose you might call it a bit of a numbers game. Anyone who doesn't really know what we've been doing but is still trying to evaluate the work will be strongly influenced by the number of properties we've dealt with.

They won't see all the things that we had to think about. They won't know about the quality of each job."

(b) Recognition of Results

If HAT, regardless of what form it takes in the future, is seen to have been responsible for producing some 'good' results, then these results may of themselves gain R kudos. His immediate boss, E, will in turn be regarded with some favour by the Chief Executive if some progress appears to have been made on the problem of restoring Bath's marginal housing. A pressure for success does seem to be passed down to R, although what really counts as success higher up is not at all clear. R pointed to the difference between a careful and considered evaluation of results and a rough and ready appraisal that is satisfied so long as something appropriate seems to be happening either often enough or in large enough quantities. It is by and large this last kind of measure which is perforce applied by senior executives or council members to HAT's output.

(c) Influential Circle

Being co-ordinator of HAT means that R comes into contact with a much wider circle of people than he would as a senior officer of environmental health, his normal designation otherwise. This is true both

because of the interdisciplinary/interdepartmental nature of the work, but also because R is often meeting members of the public, or their representatives such as solicitors, accountants and estate agents. He obtains two types of benefit from this. First, a straightforward and immediate benefit because he quite simply enjoys meeting different types of people. This makes, R says, the working day more congenial, and gives him a sense of greater significance. But it also allows him the potential to move into prominence and to escape from the relative obscurity of the Department of Environmental Health into a somewhat wider net of Local Government affairs. He made the following observation about this issue:

"If you can get out of the office a bit and meet a few people who are prominent in the town it seems to me that there's a greater chance of opportunities coming your way. But if you just swim in your own particular little pond then you're likely to stay there, even if you eventually rise to the top of it. Besides, you can then get talked about to people who are controlling your position in the pond and this can be a way of filtering good P.R. into the system."

There is a certain pathos in this rather optimistic suggestion that by exposing himself to a wider circle of people engaged in local affairs R will somehow

increase his chances of doing better within his career. Presumably, some opportunity or other 'might turn up'.

Increased Job Mobility

R has said that he regards the experience he has obtained from working with HAT as potentially valuable if he ever decided to move from Local Government (probably an unlikely event) into administration or management in some different organisational context. He sees this value as deriving principally from two connected aspects. First, that he has now accumulated some inter-departmental experience, some knowledge of planning, of estates management and building surveying and engineering practices. Second, that he is able to say that he has been operating as manager of an interdisciplinary working team, responsible for co-ordinating its work and controlling its output.

Increased Organisational Status

The question of status did not often arise in discussion with the people who work in the Department of Environmental Health where R is based. There are four other environmental health officers, one senior and three junior to R. The atmosphere surrounding the workplace has a distinctive Local Government flavour. It is one of rather unexciting but homely respectability. Yet one thing that R apparently obtains from his somewhat novel position as co-ordinator of HAT is just a hint

of a different world, a world of appointments, meetings, debate, deadlines - a world of 'management'. R gets a taste of the life of the 'executive', on a small enough scale, but nonetheless as a real enough feeling. He has taken on certain mannerisms which are more 'businesslike' than the normal, rather languid Local Government style. Crisp phone calls to elicit information from obscure clerks, meeting minutes dictated and produced in short time, use of the intercom to give instructions to his secretary when it would actually be quicker to put his head round the door and talk to her.

Thus R has somehow elevated his position and changed his image by becoming involved with the management of this team. It is not only his image to himself that he has changed in this way but also the impression that he conveys to other people. One of the members of the office staff has noted:

"R was always tidy and organised but he has become even more businesslike since he became seriously involved with HAT. We pull his leg about it sometimes."

When I asked R about any possible change of status resulting from his involvement with the Housing Assessment Team, he replied that:

"It doesn't make any difference really. Nobody worries much about that sort of thing here. People would soon pull you down from a high horse."

And yet the image he has of himself in his job is clearly important to R. It is not status based in a competitive way, but rather in a more absolute sense in that he prefers to see himself as making a useful contribution to the world at large rather than as a bureaucratic paper-pusher.

Increased Income

R has improved his position on the Local Government salary scale by taking on the extra responsibility of co-ordinating HAT. Welcome though this slight gain doubtless is to a family man whose salary is in any case modest, this aspect of the job appears to be of less significance than any of the others. R may be ambitious, up to a point and within the limited confines of his particular area of Local Government, but the relatively small differentials that apply to different managerial grades are unlikely to be serious motivators in themselves. What he seems to be more concerned with is his competence and self-respect.

R commented on the fact that, because the Housing Assessment Team had reached something of a turning

point in its life, he had been thinking more about what he wanted from his job just recently:

"You see, when the inquiry came up and also this review being due, I suddenly realised that I wouldn't like to revert to the pre-HAT days. That would be pretty dreary. So I'm doing everything possible to see that it continues."

We move on now to look at how some of E's interests came to the surface in the course of the discussions thrown up by event of the public inquiry.

(ii) E: Some Dimensions of Personal Interest

E is in his early sixties and was due to retire some eighteen months after the time that this case was current. He has been in Local Government almost all his working life and is a highly experienced committee man. Despite his longevity of service, however, he appears to be rather nervous, seems to lack self-confidence and is cautious about making final decisions. He is known to his staff as an arch prevaricator and is famed for sitting on the fence. E is an exponent of planned procrastination, a devotee of masterly inactivity in cases of doubt. His over-riding ambition is to arrive safely at retirement without any organisational disasters occurring. However, the particular case that provided the stimulus for this chapter also

proved to be something of a threat to the smooth running of his affairs. It involved the public airing and hopeful reconciliation of two contradictory viewpoints taken by E and his department at different points in time. The cottages that are the subject of this case were recommended by the Bath City Council for demolition largely on E's say so, in 1970. Quoting again from the proceedings of the public inquiry:

"In December 1970 the City Council received and accepted the official representation of the Medical Officer of Health ... that

- (a) the houses in the area were unfit for human habitation
- (b) the most satisfactory method of dealing with the conditions in the area was the demolition of all the buildings in the area.

The City Council accordingly declared a Clearance Area and made a Compulsory Purchase Order under the Housing Acts ..."

The administration necessary to complete that order took so long to operate that its final appearance was preceded both by reorganisation and by an official change in local government housing policy. This was introduced by a white paper in 1974 which exhorted urban councils to make the most of existing housing

properties and to rehabilitate and convert rather than demolish and build afresh. The Housing Assessment Team was eventually instituted in Bath as a direct result of this policy change. The fate of the cottages which had once been recommended for demolition was thus once again up for review, this time under the new Housing Assessment procedures and their stated objective of finding an economically acceptable way of converting them back into housing units. The properties were duly 'processed' and accepted as being economically convertible. R had negotiated a scheme with an interested development company. Shortly afterwards, Avon County Council re-proposed the road widening scheme which necessitated demolishing the cottages on Prior Park Road. Bath City Council was then put in the difficult position of having to defend in public the retention of the cottages that it had previously recommended be demolished. This inconsistency could in principle be easily rationalised by the policy change that had taken place in the interim, but E, who had been involved in the earlier case and was now giving evidence on behalf of HAT, was nervous about the situation. He knew how these things tended to be looked at. He commented to me that:

"It's never a question of rational reasoning in these situations. People are always suspicious when you change your mind. It smacks of indecisiveness and

incompetence. You are assumed not to have thought things through carefully in the first place. It's a great pity really. If officers felt more able to change their minds I'm sure we'd have less really major cock ups. Still, we all have to survive the way things are."

Although E would undoubtedly be able to make a sound and sensible case for the apparent change in viewpoint of his department, he knew that something else would rub off on them. When I asked him whether he was seriously concerned about that, he replied that it didn't matter much, particularly at his stage of the game. I wasn't sure that he believed what he said though:

"Well it won't affect me really, I'll be retiring in a year or two anyway. I'm quite secure until then, I've got quite a fair track record you see."

That fact that E referred at all to the question of security seemed indicative of a certain edginess. He also mentioned his 'track record' to me, a confidence I was rather surprised at. His staff had always told me that E was basically good at his job, but was forever worried about putting a foot wrong. In my discussions over this case I had expected him therefore to be rather reserved. In fact he told me a great deal about how he saw his job. In particular, three factors

kept coming up which could be interpreted as personal interest that E would always bear in mind when overseeing the work of HAT. They were:

- (a) Providing competent output for the Housing Committee as and when required.
- (b) Making sure that members of the public were never upset to the extent of generating bad publicity.
- (c) Making sure that the Department of Environmental Health kept its end up with respect to other departments represented on the team.

Acceptable Output

The Housing Committee, comprising a small group of councillors, meets approximately every month. Recommendations made by the Housing Assessment Team are put to this committee for action. E sees it as being important to maintain a steady flow into this committee as an indication that work is being continuously carried out. He commented to me that:

"The Councillors need to see that we are processing the business. They don't know what we do really. But they're all puritans at heart and like to think that the taxpayer is getting value for money. Unfortunately that is often measured in quantity rather than quality."

Thus, when E is overseeing R, which he does on a

weekly basis, one of his important objectives as the monthly committee meeting draws near will be to see that HAT comes up with sufficient material for that meeting, either in the form of recommendations or at least a progress report in the case of work or negotiations in process. This pressure drives R's work along, so that quick and ready solutions to housing cases are preferred to solutions which require lengthy negotiations through correspondence or where there are extensive external alterations proposed that necessitate delicate, time-consuming, planning applications.

Keeping the Public Happy

There are two significant sub-sets of the public at large that can interact closely with HAT in the normal course of housing cases. These are:

- (i) Individuals directly concerned with particular cases, e.g. occupiers, owners, estate agents, bank managers, solicitors, property developers, contractors.
- (ii) Members of local conservation and planning groups who are acting continually as watchdogs on the Council, on property developers and the environmental changes that they may bring about.

With the first group E exhibits a strong professionalism. He is careful how he treats them. This is not always the same thing as being concerned about their welfare. Rather, he treats them so as not to infringe any rules of conduct in that situation, is cautious in the construction of letters, for example, or about what he says at meetings. He has learned in a long career in local government not to promise what cannot be achieved, to be circumspect in the quoting of figures and cautious in estimating deadlines and the time required for any particular piece of work to be carried out. R differs from E in the extent of such caution. He is more likely to open his mouth in order to move the business on, even at the risk of offending someone or at the risk of being misquoted. At the same time he is aware of E's circumspection and this is apt to affect his selection of courses of action. R has noted:

"E is very careful when he is dealing with people outside the Department. I suppose I do a lot of things that he wouldn't, but at least I try and move things along. But sometimes I'm aware that I will have to explain to him some course of action I'm thinking of taking and then I tend to fall into his way of thinking."

On the same subject, E confided to me that:

"R is very good at getting things done, but he sometimes gets carried away. He's been lucky so far, but if you don't cover your tracks very carefully, you can come unstuck when dealing with the public. When things go wrong, they will lay into the bureaucrats without any mercy at all."

Over a period of time, R has picked up something of this circumspection, E's wish to keep a clean record and his consequent caution have their effect, through R, upon Housing Assessment outcomes. R, because of E's operating style, tends to watch out for potentially serious brushes and conflict with the members of the public he is dealing with. Rather, he attempts as far as possible to maintain smooth external relations.

With the conservation groups, E is more relaxed:

"They're more a part of the system really, they know the procedures, know how to behave. Some of them have some very strong views of course, and they can put them over too. But they never play dirty, not in my experience. So long as you keep them informed and listen to what they have to say."

Representing the Department

Three other Departments apart from Environmental Health are represented on HAT. The Planning Department, the

Estates Management Department and The Building Engineers. There are rivalries between these Departments, and particularly between Planning and Environmental Health. This is partly because of a certain overlapping of professional concerns. Both are concerned with evaluating buildings against certain criteria and there are occasions when those criteria come into conflict. Planning people tend to regard environmental health people as rather conservative, unimaginative and pedantic, stolidly adhering to a fixed list of rather 'down-to-earth' requirements for buildings e.g. location of WC's, size of doorways, amount of sunlight, and so on. Environmental Health people tend to regard planners as arty, impractical and over-liberal, often not having sufficient recognition of the 'constraints of real life'.

E is somewhat intimidated by his opposite numbers in the Planning Department. He is by nature very reserved, almost shy and, although he is overall a competent administrator, he seems to find the social aspects of meetings and committees difficult to handle. The Planners, by virtue of the kind of people they are, find such interaction entirely non-problematic and so have a continuous process edge over E. E often responds by retreating back to make or defend a particular point, hanging onto this idea doggedly and thus tending to enhance the caricature of Environmental

Health officers that the Planners hold. Nevertheless, he is always trying in such meetings to keep his department's flag flying, to ensure that his staff are seen to be making a competent contribution and to retain, as it were, the mandate to be co-ordinating HAT's activities.

E observed to me that:

"My people are good at their jobs and I always try and represent what they do as well as possible. The Planners are inclined to put us down, of course. They see us as a load of stodgy public health inspectors. But R will often take a much broader view than they do so they have to look to their laurels."

E clearly relies upon R to keep his Department's image fresh and up with the competition. Although he is sometimes nervous about R's propensity for action, he is pleased that R is able to get things done and, also, that he puts up a good show in relation to the Planners.

6.4 Some Observations on a Personal Interest Model

The foregoing discussion has dealt with some examples of two sets of individual interests that were highlighted during the course of a particular HAT case.

We have not been concerned with the events of the case itself except insofar as they have triggered comments that increase our knowledge about the preoccupations that members of the team take to their work and to their interactions with each other. We are interested here in the manifestation of the concept of personal interest and how the idea might or might not help us to understand the processes involved in group decision-making.

By personal interest, we have been implicitly referring to some kind of drive in an individual to look after himself within an organisational context. An extreme model of this form would presumably view such a team as HAT as a forum for all out competition between the members, in which they were each continually struggling to come out best, whatever they might each mean by that. It is quite clear, however, that in HAT this process is not happening in any strongly competitive way. We must somehow refine the concept if it is to have any useful explanatory power.

What might be described as the units of personal interest are apparently highly idiosyncratic. We have seen in this case something of the diversity in dimension of the aims recognised and pursued by R, and how E is a very different sort of person with different concerns. But even if there did exist some

commonality of concepts between such individuals, the value that each might place on the ideas could presumably vary considerably. Two people may each be able to construe the notion of 'maximising annual salary', but one might put a high value on this as an activity while another, a devout Christian perhaps, might actively attempt not to improve his financial well-being at the expense of other organisation members.

In this example, though, do we then go on to say that the salary-chaser is highly self-interested while his more public-spirited colleague is the very anti-thesis of this, or do we suppose that each defines his own self-interest in a very particular way? Maslow (op. cit.) would contend that simple definitions of self-interest in this sense are in any case impossible:

"We should give up the attempt once and for all to make atomistic lists of drives or needs. For several different reasons such lists are theoretically unsound. First of all they imply an equality of the various drives that are listed, an equality of potency and probability of appearance. This is incorrect because the probability of any one desire emerging into consciousness depends on the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other prepotent desires. There are great differences in probability of appearance

of the various particular drives.

"Secondly such a listing implies an isolatedness of each of these drives from each of the others. Of course they are not isolated in any such fashion.

"Third, such a listing of drives, since it is usually made on the behavioural basis, neglects completely all that we know about the dynamic nature of drives."

From a research point of view, it is important to distinguish between what a person will state as a personal objective and what can be implied from his behaviour. D, the Estates Management representative on HAT, is often to be heard espousing an ambition to earn lots of money. He will make this point with apparent seriousness and it does sometimes seem as though part of the image that he likes to portray to the outside world includes the possibility of his being able to become a 'financial success'. Yet his actions and strategies within his own department do not always match those of a man determined to get to the top and, indeed, the fact that he is relatively securely employed in Local Government rather than doing battle in private practice 'outside' might give some indication of other objectives that are at least as important.

Implied by identifying the notion of personal interest is the existence of concepts which reflect other kinds of interest. Concerns about the working group, for example, concerns about other individuals in the organisation, concerns for the institution itself, concerns for one's family, concerns for a particular political cause are other possible components in the mix of criteria for adjudging the goodness of ideas or events. The definitional question raised earlier applies here too. That is, if an individual is to be regarded as being driven by any such preoccupation, is it reasonable to say that he is acting in his own self-interest, this being defined in a different way, or might there rather exist some kind of trade-off between personal interest and 'other' interests or sometimes even the complete sublimation of personal interest in favour of some other cause.

The question of the moral judgements that people make about the pursuit of individual interests is important in an organisational context. There is often a curious ambivalence within commercial or administrative organisations concerning the 'proper' pursuit, for example, of ambition. Thus, whilst it might be recognised and generally accepted by the staff of a local government department that it is a good thing for a junior officer to be hardworking, competitive and concerned about his career, there are normally

quite fine social limits applied to this trait and a point may be reached when other staff members will start to make perjorative evaluations about an individual who is seen to be exclusively concerned with himself and not enough about his colleagues or the work group or the institution or the public or whatever else. That is, there are clearly more or less socially acceptable ways of pursuing one's own interests within the confines of an organisation.

Different individuals will have different ideas about what those limits are and, moreover, will be constrained by them in different ways and in differing degrees. Whatever the philosophical issues, too, that surround the reification of concepts such as 'organisation', 'committee' or 'department', there is no doubt that individuals working within an organisation will often have quite strong ideas about the extent to which they feel that they ought to have individual freedom and the extent to which the organisation ought to prevail in given sets of circumstances. This sense of balance derives partly from the fact that the individual is himself party to at least an economic contractual relationship with the organisation, partly from a long process of socialisation which will have constantly reaffirmed the idea that there is a time and a place for everything and that the individual often has to subordinate himself to a larger or somehow more

important cause, and partly from authority relationships and rules of behaviour that exist within the organisation and that are commonly deemed to be proper to the business of working for a living.

So that while an individual may perceive for himself a particular personal objective and see ways in which that aim could be fulfilled, he may also be constrained from following the strategy through by the belief that he ought not really to be doing that sort of thing and that the collective of which he is a part ought properly to have a prior call upon his loyalties.

In this connection, there was a rather singular meeting of the Housing Assessment Team that took place during the late summer of 1978. The first hour of the morning was entirely given over to the discussion of where everyone had been or was planning to go on holiday. R's visit to Wales, J's trip to Brittany, G's tour of Italy, D's proposed camping holiday and the author's recent sailing weekend kept everyone fully absorbed until R finally remarked:

"We really ought to start working through this agenda, less exciting though that probably will be!"

Then the team settled down 'to business', interactions became more formal and more carefully phrased and the

team members became more serious as they once again started to carry out their organisational duty.

As far as HAT is concerned, there appear to exist levels of interaction at which it is difficult to conceive of any kind of significant personal interest as being able to have an effect upon the outcome of a meeting. When, for example, the technical details of a proposed property conversion are being discussed, there is precious little scope for individuals to cunningly turn affairs to their own advantage. The stages are low and conversation turns upon the width of a staircase, the state of the plaster in a kitchen or the condition of the stone in an adjoining wall. There does exist some kind of pressure for contributions to be competent; that is, to be coherent, germane, articulate and timely. A certain amount of off-the-track rambling is allowable, but there is a close consensus about when that limit is reached.

An important question now to ask is, in what sort of way do the kinds of category of personal interest that we have identified for R and E relate to the typical sequence of discourse and events that constitutes a housing assessment case. It has already been made clear that we do not consider that attempts to construct formal models that aspire to the status of system specifications or simulation algorithms are

the most effective way to throw light upon the workings of a social group such as HAT. Our intention has rather been to draw out and elaborate from case material gleaned from a long association with the group, well-formed concepts which can contribute, in a similar way as would any relevant ideas or experience from other sources, to insight into its workings.

We have therefore identified five different areas of uncertainty that could possibly be reduced by consideration of a developed concept of personal interest; that is to say, five classes of knowledge which can be derived from the findings. These are:

- (i) Knowledge about the psychological make-up of particular individuals - that is, what they are like as people.
- (ii) Knowledge about the kinds of ways in which particular individuals are likely to react to and treat a particular topic for discussion.
- (iii) Knowledge about the likely reactions of individuals to simple turning points.
- (iv) From these first three points, knowledge about likely outcomes in dialogue discussion or two-person meetings.
- (v) Knowledge about the nature of particular group outcomes.

We now examine these ideas individually

(i) Knowledge about what individuals are like

One of the first things that a researcher does, quite naturally, when starting to look at a particular social situation, is to build up a picture of what sort of people the participants are. At the very first meeting he will use whatever information is available (and it might be very sketchy) to construct caricatures on all kinds of dimensions - background, 'intelligence', occupation (if that is not already clear), 'personality', likely outside interests, seniority and so on. These initial models are modified and elaborated over time as more information is collected about each person and each is seen in an increasing number of different sets of circumstances and surroundings. As we learn more about what individuals are like then we are better able to predict what they will do in new situations. We tend to presume that this is a monotonically increasing relationship - that is, the more that we 'know' about an individual the greater our predictive power or, at least, the less likely we are to be surprised by his actions.

It is difficult to say, however, exactly how such knowledge about a number of individuals can be 'combined' to give us new knowledge about the overall characteristics of a group. What commonly happens,

it seems, is that the group is reified and treated rather as a single operating unit. Over a period of time anyone studying a group with some consistency of membership will build up a model of what the group is like, and how it, collectively, is likely to react to new sets of circumstances. Knowledge about individual members is clearly an important part of this model. More interestingly, concepts or categories of behaviour abstracted from the actions of individual members in particular groups will have a more general value in explaining how other similar groups might operate.

What we are saying here is that gaining knowledge about individuals in a group is probably the first and most effective thing that a researcher can do. It is relatively easy both to build up and articulate that knowledge over time and to classify items of behaviour and draw out abstractions. Consideration of particular events and the relationship between particulars and abstracted categories then improves our knowledge about that and other groups. The notion of personal interest seems to be a particularly useful focus for thinking about that relationship.

(ii) Knowledge about reactions to work material

This is, in a sense, a second order class of knowledge following on from (i). That is to say, information

about the personal interests of an individual member of HAT may tell us something about how he is likely to relate to his work and react to particular pieces of subject matter. We may learn something about both his style of treatment and about the likely kind of content of his response. So that whilst (i) constitutes knowledge about the individual, we can move on further to consider knowledge about the kinds of effects he can have. One such class is essentially the kind of work that he will generate.

(iii) Knowledge about reactions to simple 'turning points'

Knowledge about the personal interests, motives, aims or preferences of an individual group member will give us some basis for predicting and understanding how he will react to simple choice situations. We use the word simple advisedly and should probably restrict consideration to yes/no turning points. So that in a HAT meeting, when M, the second planning member is confronted by the question, 'shall we demolish this building?' he will almost always say 'no'. This is because he is a staunch, almost fanatical conservationist and will always be able to find a good reason for retaining anything, at whatever cost. If this kind of simple question comes up in a meeting, we believe that we know how he will react. Similarly, D, if confronted by the question of whether public or private sector finance ought to be mobilised for a particular

conversion, will always vote for private sector finance. This is a strong and apparently rather consistent part of his system of political beliefs. What we are saying, then, is that if certain types of simple decision questions arise at meetings, knowledge about the interests of individual members can enable us to predict, sometimes with a high degree of certainty, particular individual reactions.

(iv) Knowledge about dialogue outcomes

Extending the idea of knowledge about effects leads us to consider knowledge about how two individuals will interact. If we know something about the personal interests of two group members, we may be able to go on and say something about how those interests will interplay in dialogue and what kinds of outcome will be more or less likely.

(v) Knowledge about the nature of particular outcomes

We refer here not to the content of group output, but rather to how we think it has been derived. That is, there is clearly a difference between saying that a particular HAT decision is the result of a group of professionals conscientiously devoting themselves to the task of finding the best solution to a housing problem and saying that it is primarily the result of a personal battle between a couple of particularly careerist members. Knowledge of members' personal

interests will help us to appreciate what kind of result the team has produced.

These five classes represent different ways in which we believe that observations based upon an elaborated concept of personal interest can contribute to understanding about the workings of a group such as the Housing Assessment Team. In this chapter we have outlined a case in which the personal interest of the leaders of HAT came to the fore, mainly because a public inquiry took place and E and R were principally concerned with producing and making representations to the inquiry. We have attempted to articulate these interests and to illustrate how they can relate in general to incidents in particular meetings. We have also suggested some elaborations and problematics associated with the idea of personal interest as an explanatory concept. In this way, it was intended to lend further perspective to the notion of strategy and group interest discussed earlier in this thesis.

7 A SATISFICING MODEL OF GROUP DECISION-MAKING

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter we examine a model of group decision-making based upon the notion of satisficing, developed by March and Simon (1958). Satisficing is associated with intentionally sub-optimising choice behaviour and we discuss instances of such behaviour which occurred in the course of a Housing Assessment Team case. We review the concept of satisficing and consider some aspects of the nature of the relationship between satisficing and its parent concept, optimising.

7.2 A Summary Case History

The Housing Assessment case that is outlined here has been unfolding over a period of several years. It centres upon a small family business - a petrol filling and service station - and upon a terrace of five now crumbling 19th Century artisan cottages adjoining the garage itself. Early in 1974 these cottages, along with many other properties in the City of Bath, were listed for preservation as a result of an inspection exercise carried out by the Department of the Environment. The process of listing confers statutory obligations upon the owner of the property. It becomes illegal for the property to be demolished and anyone who does wish to take down a listed building has to apply to the Department of the

Environment for formal consent. The owner of a listed property is also obliged to maintain the building in sound structural and externally decorative order. Set against these restrictions, the owner may apply for a variety of grants to help finance necessary maintenance work.

In 1975, the proprietor of the filling station, Mr B, who also owns the two terrace cottages immediately alongside, submitted to the City Planning Department proposals to demolish the end cottage and to thereby extend his garage frontage and forecourt. Planning permission for this project was refused on the grounds that the cottage was a listed building and also because it was thought that any increased traffic through the garage that might follow the enlargement of the forecourt would adversely affect the living conditions for the residents in the remaining cottages. Mr B, however, decided to pursue the matter further and, after taking legal advice, submitted an application to the Department of the Environment for listed building consent to demolish the end terrace. This application resulted in a public inquiry and, in due course, the Inspector found in favour of the cottage being retained. Mr B's plans, therefore, were thwarted again and he continued to run the garage using the existing facilities. Meanwhile, his two cottages steadily fell into a state of disrepair

and soon became unfit to be used as living accommodation. The general ambiance of the site was, in any case, hardly congenial for residential purposes, the properties being subject to noise from the garage workshops at the rear, to engine noise and exhaust fumes from cars using the filling station forecourt and from the considerable volume of traffic using the busy London Road on which the cottages and the garage stand.

The external condition of the cottages deteriorated further until it was in contravention of the standards laid down in the listed building legislation. It was at this stage, early in 1977, that the cottages first came to the formal attention of the Department of Environmental Health and, hence, of the Housing Assessment Team. The complete terrace was then added to the Housing Assessment Action List.

Thus began a drawn out series of discussions and negotiations primarily between R, the co-ordinator of the Housing Assessment Team, Mr B himself and Mr B's solicitors. Mr B still hoped eventually to be able to pull down the deteriorating end terrace and extend his garage premises, but as R was continually pointing out, the public inquiry had found in favour of the cottages' retention and the law was the law. R, meanwhile, had the task of trying to persuade

Mr B to renovate the two cottages to an exterior standard that satisfied the listed building legislation and, further, as part of the HAT programme, of seeing that they were put to good social use, preferably as housing.

The case was discussed at a number of HAT meetings and several possible uses for the cottages were suggested. Principal among these were office accommodation for Mr B or a tenant, student living accommodation, temporary (Class 2) living accommodation for the City Council and overflow storage space for Mr B's garage. It was generally thought by members of the Team that the properties were not suitable for permanent living accommodation because of their position immediately adjoining the garage at the side and also the main road at the front. They tended to favour the conversion of the cottages into offices.

Mr B was not enthusiastic about any of these schemes. Having twice been blocked from carrying out his original plan and having incurred significant legal costs in the process, he was not inclined to be especially co-operative with the City Council or with the Housing Assessment Team. However, the fact still remained that his two cottages were listed buildings and the legislation required him to maintain them to a certain standard. This legislation is backed

by the sanction of the possibility of compulsory purchase by the Council.

Notwithstanding this sanction, Mr B appeared to be unwilling or unable to spend the money necessary to bring the cottages up to the required standard, even though, as R suggested, costs could be kept to a minimum by concentrating effort upon the outside of the properties and keeping the insides basic for offices or storage space. Indeed Mr B himself, in the very early stages of the negotiations, had suggested to R that he might use the end cottage as an extra office for the garage. He has since lost interest in the idea and it currently looks as though HAT will recommend to the Housing Committee that a compulsory purchase order be applied for with a view to either forcing Mr B to take some action himself or to the Council taking over the cottages and carrying out the necessary work itself.

7.3 Satisficing Behaviour

Satisficing is a term originally coined by Simon (1957) to refer to that kind of problem-solving behaviour characterised by the searching for workable rather than optimum solutions. As March and Simon (1958) have observed:

"Most human decision-making, whether individual or

organisational, is concerned with the discovery and selection of satisfactory alternatives; only in exceptional cases is it concerned with the discovery and selection of optimal alternatives."

The analysis of this chapter focuses upon this basic idea and we shall be pointing to instances of what appears to be satisficing behaviour in the case outline in 7.2. But, at the same time, we shall also contend that the notion of satisficing is rather complex and ought not to be viewed purely in stark contradistinction with optimising. March and Simon (op. cit.) go on to say:

"... finding the optimal alternative is a radically different problem from finding a satisfactory alternative. An alternative is optimal if: (1) there exists a set of criteria that permits all alternatives to be compared, and (2) the alternative in question is preferred, by these criteria, to all other alternatives. An alternative is satisfactory if: (1) there exists a set of criteria that describes minimally satisfactory alternatives, and (2) the alternative in question meets or exceeds all these criteria."

In the current research, we are not concerned to prescribe strategies for taking good decisions,

rather we are attempting to illuminate the processes by which people do decide, particularly when this activity is being carried out by more than one individual negotiating together or by a decision-making group.

For the great majority of people who have no grounding in the analysis of decisions, the concept of best outcome is usually rather intuitively formed. Criteria for selection between options may exist but will often be fuzzy and half-recognised. Where, indeed, there is more than one criterion within the set, the process of weighing them against each other quickly becomes complicated. Ackoff (1962) has said that:

"It is not at all obvious what is meant by the 'best' solution to a problem. A final definition of 'best' in this context has not yet been attained, and it is not likely that it ever will be."

This is underlining a philosophical difficulty of deciding what is meant by optimum. Simon's (1957) argument is rather that, whilst it is possible to define what it would mean for an individual to take a rationally optimum decision, the sheer complexity of the required process is usually completely overwhelming:

"It is impossible for the behaviour of a single, isolated individual to reach any high degree of rationality. The number of alternatives he must explore is so great, the information he would need to evaluate them so vast that even an approximation to objective rationality is hard to conceive."

Simon's use of the term objective rationality is interesting as a triangulation point, but it doesn't move us too far towards a better understanding of how decision-makers do actually cope with complexity. Simon almost views the human incapacity as pathological. Conversely, it could be argued that it is rather amazing how many apparently good decisions do get taken in cases where there is little reliable information to go on.

There are two particular and very different ways of considering the concept of satisficing, both of which March and Simon (op. cit.) acknowledge.

The first is simply to regard satisficing as an expedient for coping with the pressures of work or time that would preclude a full analysis of the situation. The model here is that satisficing is a kind of second best strategy. It is saying that we would like to take a lot more into account if only we had the time or the resources, but actually

we can only manage to pick out a reasonable looking option that seems to work and make do with that.

The second way of looking at satisficing is to recognise that the very process of analysis has costs associated with it and that it is usually possible to sense a point of equilibrium at which the marginal cost of obtaining further information is equal to the likely gain to be obtained from a 'more optimal' solution. March and Simon (op. cit.) note that:

"In making choices that meet satisfactory standards, the standards themselves are part of the definition of the situation. Hence, we need not regard these as given - any more than the other element of the definition of the situation - but may include in the theory the processes through which these standards are set and modified. The standard-setting process may itself meet standards of rationality: for example, an 'optimising' rule would be to set the standard at the level where the marginal improvement in alternatives obtainable by raising it would be just balanced by the marginal cost of searching for alternatives meeting the higher standard. Of course, in practice the 'marginal improvement' and the 'marginal cost' are seldom measured in comparable units, or with much accuracy. Nevertheless, a similar result would be automatically attained if the standards were

raised whenever alternatives proved easy to discover, and lowered whenever they were difficult to discover."

People are often heard to articulate this kind of idea in such comments as:

"It's not worth going into too much detail, I reckon that would do the job nicely."

or:

"We can't afford to hang around talking about it all morning, let's just go for this one and have done with it."

There is another reaction to the notion of satisficing that we have not yet mentioned and it has to do with people's tastes and capacity for analysis. Some individuals prefer to take quick decisions on the basis of hardly any information as a matter of personal style:

"Manoli's sixty-year old body reminds me of some ancient boat, cankered and swollen at the seams from years of sea-work; yet his heart is in repair still, and with it that marvellous natural intelligence which is only to be found among the semi-literate. His daughter reads the newspapers to him. His interest

in world-politics is a consuming passion and it is wonderful how clearly he reads between the lines of a conference or a speech to deduce at once its failure or success, its truth or intrinsic falsity ...

'Finland is waking up,' he says oracularly.

'Do you think they will give in to Russia?'

'Naturally.'

'I don't.'

'You are English. They never see things before they happen. The English are very slow.'

'And what about the Greeks?'

'The Greeks are fast ... piff ... paff ... They decide.'

'But each one decides differently.'

'That is individualism.'

'But it leads to chaos.'

'We like chaos.'

(Lawrence Durrell, *Reflections on a Marine Venus*)

By the same token, there are many people who feel most uncomfortable if they haven't gone over all possible ground before making a choice.

There is a sense in which satisficing may be a more common and natural reaction to group decision processes than to individual selection. When I asked Mr B about the discussions he had had with R about his listed cottages, he replied that:

"We've been going round in ever-decreasing circles. Whenever I make a suggestion he says it can't be done, whenever he makes one it doesn't sound any use to me at all. When you're trying to work something out with someone else, you never seem to get to the point somehow. In the end, you go along with something you don't really agree with just to get some action."

In this kind of situation, the model that each individual has of the problem arena is continually being upset by dialogue with the other. Even at best, much of the interaction is taken up with trying to communicate each other's point of view and understand how the other is thinking and reasoning. What might be described as the analytical stage of the process may never be reached. Or at least if it is, there are probably still two sets of ideas and terminology being employed and, for each participant, the concepts that go to make up his argument are always being imperfectly expressed in the other's terms. In the end one of them may agree with the other out of sheer fatigue and frustration.

In my initial discussions with Mr B, I tried to obtain some idea of how he viewed the alternative ways of dealing with his cottages. I first asked him how the problem started:

"Well it all began when the D of E decided to list the bloody places at all. It's absolutely crazy. I mean they're just a row of old, delapidated, damp, unattractive workers' houses. Why on earth go to all this trouble to hold them up. The whole thing is a waste of public money."

What had he been going to do with the houses before they were listed?

"I wasn't sure. I had some students living in one of them and I was using the nearest as a store. Then the students moved out and I never got any to replace them. The place got a bit run down I suppose, then this inspection was carried out and the list went on. Those students would have laughed to know that their place had a preservation order on it! I was a bit too late. After they'd been listed, trade picked up quite a bit and I thought it would be an idea to extend the forecourt."

Did he think about doing anything else with them?

"Well not really, they're worth nothing much as living accommodation. The students only just covered the rates, I couldn't charge 'em very much you see. It seemed easiest to knock them down, or at least one of them, and use the space."

It did not appear that Mr B had considered at all systematically the range of possible solutions to his cottage 'problem' e.g. renovation and letting for habitation, renovation and letting for office use, renovation and selling-off for either of these two purposes, renovation and use for offices and storage space for his own garage - these were all possible alternative courses of action. But Mr B seemed to prefer the much simpler expedient of demolishing the worst cottage, thereby saving the effort and cost involved in renovation and avoiding the subsequent administration involved in disposing of or renting the property. Taking down the cottage would be a comparatively cheap operation, would remove a source of expense and aggravation and, at the same time, provide the garage with more space and frontage.

The significant drawback to this simple plan was that all the cottages in the terrace next to the garage were now listed, i.e. there was a strong presumption in favour of their not being demolished. However, Mr B went ahead and applied for planning permission to demolish the end terrace and waited for the Planning Committee's decision. The Committee decided, predictably enough, that the cottage should be retained. Very soon afterwards, somewhat annoyed, Mr. B took the very positive step of submitting an application to the Department of the Environment to

have the cottage removed from the preservation list. He rather resented being told by the planning authorities what he could or could not do with his own property and therefore put in the application to the Department of the Environment more or less as a matter of principle.

B explained to me that:

"This is supposed to be a free country, and yet here were these characters telling me what to do with my own property. Why the hell shouldn't I take the place down if I want to. Anyway, you can only fight them on their own ground so I put in an application."

As is usual on these occasions, the Department set up a public inquiry to examine the case. Mr B, however, was not to receive much support for his project from any of the parties giving evidence. R was of the opinion that a proposal drawn up in collaboration with HAT, for the demolition of the end terrace and the renovation of the remainder, could have been successful. But the inquiry found against Mr B's proposal and the cottages remained on the preservation list. It seems here that Mr B was not obviously concerned to optimise his strategy for obtaining a demolition order. Having decided that he would like to remove the end cottage, although this was perhaps not in itself the 'best' decision he could make, he did not then devote much

energy or thought to ensuring that his application stood a reasonable chance of success.

When the application did fail, Mr B almost totally ignored the cottage which then fell into a complete state of disrepair. Again, his apparent lack of will to 'optimise' in a given set of circumstances is notable. Now that he was not in a position to demolish his cottage as he at first intended, he was at least free to decide upon his next move. Being a listed building, the cottage was eligible for certain renovation grants. It could have been regarded as a sensible policy for B to try and turn the cottage into a source of income in order to offset its own running expenses. Part of the property could have been converted and rented as office accommodation or storage space or, alternatively B could have used the office and storage space for his own business, also obtaining some tax relief by so doing.

Throughout the long period of his negotiations with R, Mr B, it could be argued, had not been serving his own interests in the best possible way. He had always shown a reluctance to take any decisions or to even talk about the future of the cottage, although R had tried many times to work out a suitable scheme with him. B might have gained much by working with R, who is in a position to ease the administrative way with

regard to renovation grants, to make useful practical suggestions about the conversion of the cottage, and to advise on what kind of schemes might find favour with the planning committee and what they would be likely to frown upon.

R, in his turn, has throughout this case tended to react to Mr B's moves as they were made, rather than to try and predict the situation in which they both might find themselves and to pre-empt possible problems. Although HAT had not officially noticed these cottages, R knew at the time that Mr B made the application for listed building consent to demolish that it was almost certain to be turned down, and yet he allowed Mr B to go ahead with his fight. Although it was not strictly in his brief to do so, R could have saved himself considerable trouble later on if he had managed to liaise early and off the record with B to work out a mutually acceptable and practical future for his cottages. This would have involved presenting himself as an advisor or consultant rather than as a housing inspector, which latter role Mr B quickly took exception to. In common with many small businessmen, B is inclined to be intolerant of 'bureaucratic interference' of this kind.

R seemed to be satisficing, then, in so far as that when Mr B presented him with a 'new move', R reacted

to that move and within its own timescale. He appeared not to be thinking too far ahead about how events of the case might develop. When I asked R about 'best' and workable solutions, he said that:

"It's all a question of time really. There are only a given number of hours in the day. We do the best we can in the time available. But some cases seem easier to get on with if you know what I mean. The B's garage business has been dragging on for ages, but I don't seem to be able to get him moving. And also, it's a funny thing really, I always seem to put him at the bottom of my list somehow. It's not too important, I suppose, but it's also become a bit of an institution for everyone, wondering what the latest on B is."

R is almost playing with the case here. He realizes that something will have to be done at some time, but it doesn't really matter how long it takes and it's quite fun for all concerned to have the discussions trickling on. R's notion of satisficing and expedience is well-formed, however, and can be perceived throughout his work. Compromise, do the best you can, get something going, practical solutions, these ideas all guide the way he sets about his job.

7.4 Summary Conclusions

Satisficing seems to be so pervasive as a mode of

behaviour in organisational decision-making as to be almost a commonplace. Yet, one of its important facets is that choice-making carried out in this way with limited resources is often perceived as being 'sub-optimal' even though the choice-maker concerned might be hard pressed to define what he might mean by a best choice. That is, satisficing can be and is often seen as a pathological state.

But, at the same time, individuals like R who live with satisficing all the time will have a well-rehearsed and oft-repeated view about what 'we can ever realistically expect to achieve in practice'. It is perhaps an important stress-reducing mechanism that the organisational decision-maker appears often to seek to reduce his official sights, probably over a period of time, and then attempt to ensure that these achievable standards are circulated as common currency within his immediate organisation.

An important part of satisficing behaviour is apparently characterised by the use of contingent responses rather than of forward planning. Problems tend to be dealt with when they arise and not before. In the group decision-making sense, issues for discussion are attended to sequentially and not strategically. R and B each had to be stirred into action by a move that the other had made.

The centrality of a particular 'problem' within an individual's current set of issues to be dealt with appears to be important for the standards that he will employ for coping with it. A problem may be despatched quickly and sub-optimally if there is something more urgent or important that needs attention. Conversely, something that seemed to be vital and deserving of optimising thinking may get shorter shrift if either an even more vital problem turns up or, conversely, if the problem solver gets fed up with thinking about it and reduces his standards just to 'get shot of it'.

An interesting aspect of R's behaviour was that he was keeping the B's garage case going almost because it amused him to do so. It did not seem that the standards of solution were being relaxed here, but rather that the case was moving in and out of the problem arena.

8 CONCLUSION: Some Determinants of Group Decision Outcomes

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter we draw together the main findings and conclusions about our particular group of decision makers. First, there is a section containing some important general points about the Housing Assessment Team. We then treat the theme concepts individually and a section is devoted to the conclusions reached or implied by each of the chapters 3 through 7.

8.2 General Observations

Before considering the principal findings that have emerged from the examination and application of the main theme concepts of this thesis, we set down some rather more general observations that have relevance to most of the situations we have been looking at.

The Organisation within the Individual

Running through all the events that have made up a year in the life of one particular decision-making group has been a characteristic theme surrounding the relationship between the HAT members and different aspects of their organisation. Specifically, we have encountered the pervasive nature of organisational or bureaucratic purpose. However sharply or fuzzily this appears to be formally laid down and however

particular facets are actually perceived by individual members, the existence of this concept provides a reference point for each individual, lending an orientation to his work and also some of his non-work activities. The labels of various organisational goals are continually being used as currency in bureaucratic interaction, even if those using it are not quite sure what the label means or if they disagree with what they think it does mean.

Cyert and March's treatment of organisational goals has provided some insights into this tricky idea. In developing their theory of corporate purpose, they start by viewing the organisation as a coalition. They note that:

"... over a specified (relatively brief) period of time we can identify the major coalition members; or, for a particular decision we can identify the major coalition members. More generally, for a certain class of decisions over a relatively long period of time we can specify the major classes of coalition members. As a result, we will be able to develop models of organisational decision making (for the short run) that pay only limited attention to the process by which the coalition is changed; but any such simplification involves some clear risks when we generalise to long-run dynamics."

One of the interesting aspects of Cyert and March's conception of organisation is the way in which they uncover the complication of thinking about a concept of corporate purpose, underline the philosophical difficulties surrounding the definition of such a concept, go some way towards formulating ideas which take these problems into account but in doing so seem to be employing an epistemology which cannot preclude the existence of the phenomenon of corporate purpose in very much a systems sense. It is significant that they refer to "The Problem of Collective Goals", a problem, that is, from the theorist's point of view. They summarise the 'problem' as:

- "1. People (i.e. individuals) have goals; collectivities of people do not.
2. To define a theory of organisational decision-making, we seem to need something analogous - at the organisation level - to individual goals at the individual level."

In a way, we both agree and disagree with this reasoning. We agree, on a purely empirical basis, that there is a need for a concept of organisational goal because the phenomenon, in some form or other, is absolutely pervasive within the world of organisations. The notion itself is actually being employed by the people out there. But we do not necessarily agree

with the deductive step that Cyert and March make. What they are doing is recognising that the notion of corporate goal is problematic and that it is difficult to work out what it actually means; but they go on to assume a formulation which is exactly analogous to the notion of individual goal and bring it a mediating model of coalitions to help make it fit. We are not saying that this is not illuminating, but it does tend to preclude thinking about collective goals in different sorts of ways. Even when Cyert and March are talking about organisations as settings within which, per se, there is an inevitable conflict of goals, it still seems as though the very process by which that concept of conflict is recognised and defined depends upon the positing of a 'real' purpose somewhere for the organisation that, people being people, they cannot get themselves together to work towards. Cyert and March go on to say:

"In keeping with virtually all theories of organisations, we assume that the coalition represented in an organisation is a coalition of members having different goals. We require some procedure for resolving such conflict (why?). The classic solution is to posit an exchange of money from some members of the coalition to other members as a way of inducing conformity to a single, consistent set of goals - the organisational objective.

"We propose an alternative concept of organisational goals and an alternative set of assumptions about how conflict is resolved. Basically, we have argued that most organisations exist and thrive with considerable latent conflict of goals. Except at the level of nonoperational objectives, there is no internal consensus. The procedures for 'resolving' such conflict do not reduce all goals to a common dimension or even make them obviously internally consistent."

It is not clear here what Cyert and March mean by resolving the latent conflict. Are they referring to a resolution which must take place conceptually for the theorist if he is to be able to explicate behaviour in terms of some notion of corporate purpose? Or is it more simply that they are arguing that conflict cannot continue to exist in practice for organisations to exist coherently? If the first is the case, does not the fact that the theorist is obliged to carry out some kind of conceptual resolution imply that he is trying to fit a model that does not fit? If the second is true, why do we need to accept the idea of an organisation as exhibiting any degree of coherence with respect to purpose?

Pettigrew (1973) has pointed out that:

"Cyert and March differ from March and Simon in one

major respect: the stress that the former give to their conception of an organisation as a coalition (p. 27). To Cyert and March, decision-making is very much a political process. Unlike March and Simon, they regard conflicts of interest based on sub-goal differentiation as 'normal' parts of organisational life."

Whilst we accept this point, we would contend that the paradigm upon which Cyert and March's concept of politics is founded and which leads to their recognition of conflicts of interests, is one which nevertheless accepts the existence of a background and underlying reason for the organisation to be there. Politics and conflict are essentially conceived in organisational terms and the area of discourse is restricted to those terms.

The present research has not attempted to imply a single or set of organisational goals from that which members have said or done, but it has found that members were always able to say something about what they thought the goals of their organisation were. The concept had salience for all the organisation, particularly the HAT members that we talked to and their recognition of it appeared to be supported by their actions. There was no empirical sense in which we could say that the subjects of this study themselves regarded their employing body in terms of a coalition.

We must turn, therefore, to think in terms of models of bureaucracy which explain behaviour with respect to sets of formalised job roles. We are not necessarily arguing that these job roles are in any sense defined and disseminated by a purposeful organisation, but rather that, however they have come about historically, they are definitely extant for our set of organisation members, if only as reference symbols in Parsons' (1951) sense:

"Interactive relationships and the reciprocal roles of the parties constitute, on the relevant level, the units of which all social systems are composed. But certain further considerations come to be involved on the higher levels of organisation of collectivities. With extension of the role system beyond the particular interactive relationship, the problem arises of the extent to which the expressive symbolism is commonly shared within the wider role system. There is further the question of whether or not the symbolism is directly integrated with the common values which are constitutive of the collectivity and may, therefore, be considered to be symbols of the solidarity of the collectivity."

Not only are we saying that, for the particular group of organisation members of this study, there is a strong identification with notions of bureaucratic purpose, but also that at least a part of the personal

interests that were articulated by these individuals were also couched in organisational terms. This is what we mean by referring to the 'Organisation within the Individual'.

The Pathos of Bureaucracy

We have been concerned with trying to understand the 'decision-making' behaviour of such individuals and, in doing so, would underline a phenomenon that to some extent runs counter to the now well-developed and popular models of organisations as political forums. Here, we refer to a kind of pathos in the extent to which notions of organisational purpose have been subsumed into the thinking of the members of the group. Here is not the keen cut and thrust of career development nor the strategic manoeuvring to receive favour or an increased control over resources; there is no competition for power in any Machiavellian sense, nor for fame or recognition. The organisation that provides the context for the work of the Housing Assessment Team has no history of individual dynamic success and progress at the kind of levels that we are talking about. The issues that come to HAT for consideration are not exciting or earth-shattering. Many of them are rather dull, with just the occasional pocket of interest. The meetings themselves are often tedious for all concerned, and frequent asides are necessary

to sweeten the pill of ploughing through them. Yet, through all this, there remains a dogged adherence to what each individual believes or assumes to be the driving purpose of it all. Sometimes they are apt to question its strength, often they will disagree about what the purpose is. But it is there somewhere, they are sure, and it filters down from the organisation above them. By the same token, they perceive institutionally imposed constraints upon their behaviour as officials representing the organisation. These are not the freely negotiated codes of conduct that Coser (1964) has referred to and that Pettigrew (op. cit) comments upon:

"Coser (1964) has suggested that the power struggle itself may be a very necessary part of achieving a new stability of relations between the parties over time. Accommodation, he believes, can be reached only when the contenders have assessed their respective strength in conflict. Eventually 'the parties must agree upon rules and norms allowing them to assess their respective power position in the struggle. Their common interest leads them to accept rules which enhance their mutual dependence in the very pursuit of their antagonistic goals. Such arguments make their conflict, so to speak, self-liquidating' (Coser, 1964: 405)."

The essentially non-antagonistic relations that we have observed as being characteristic of the members of our decision-making group are not based upon a balance of power. Rather, they derive partly from a sense of how 'the organisation' expects them to conduct themselves in the course of official business, but also from what is essentially a sense of comradeship founded upon a recognition that they are all in the same organisational boat and that it is more pleasant to co-exist as peaceably as possible than it is to look for reasons for conflict.

This pathos to which we refer might have been described by T.S. Eliot:

"No, I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be;
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince; no doubt, an easy tool,
Deferential, glad to be of use,
Politic, cautious, and meticulous ... "

Non-Strategic Behaviour

The concept of strategy in a game-theoretic sense is used to describe competitive behaviour characterised by (i) the participants within a situation having interests which are to some extent incompatible; (ii) for those divergent interests to be understood

by each party; (iii) where there is a variety of possible outcomes contingent upon the elapsed sequence of responses that each party will make to the others and (iv) where the likely reaction of each participant to these possible outcomes is known to everyone else. This basic formulation is varied by game theorists to correspond with different aspects of real-life. Bennett's Hypergame model that we have examined in Chapter 3 allows that different participants have different perceptions of the total situation and of each others perceptions of it.

Outside of game theory, strategy may have a less restrictive meaning in that it can refer to essentially non-competitive situations which nevertheless involve contingency planning by someone who wants to end up somewhere in particular, but who may be hindered in this by events over which he has no control and to which he must respond in the best possible way. Hence people may refer to a strategy for launching a new product, even where no clear competition is involved, or talk about a strategy for getting a holiday abroad next year. The term is then taken to connote a form of contingency planning.

In the routine course of the work carried out by the Housing Assessment Team, significant conflicts of interest between the members were difficult to

identify. Conflicts sometimes seemed to arise amongst 'external' participants in a case, such as occurred in the Bedford Street story. But even in such circumstances, theoretical conflict in Vickers' sense was not perceived by all participants. Where it was, the interests often appeared not strong enough to be pursued aggressively and certainly not in terms of more than one move ahead. So that the essential requirements for strategic responses were generally absent in the situations examined.

Further, the prevailing culture both of the team and of its parent organisation tended to encourage and reinforce co-operation rather than competition and tended to discourage symptomatic conflict in Vickers' sense.

Unmotivated Behaviour

Maslow (1954) has observed that:

"... not all behaviour is motivated. There are many determinants of behaviour other than motives. For instance, one other important class of determinants is the so-called external field. Theoretically, at least, behaviour may be determined completely by the external field, or even by specific, isolated, external stimuli, as in association of ideas, or certain conditioned reflexes."

It was the principal theme of chapter 5 that certain events in the external field of both an individual contributor and of the decision-making group of which he is a part can cause responses and outcomes that appear to have no underlying direction and are difficult to attribute to purposeful behaviour. If the participants in a discussion have an official brief to decide upon a policy, but the force of the purpose behind that brief is weak, there may exist a real indifference among the members about the outcome of the discussions. There may be a limited incentive to move the thinking and conclusions of the meeting in one direction rather than another. In this kind of situation, the 'linguistic forces' provided by the gradually unfolding discourse may be the most significant determinants of the position of the meeting at the close. It may literally be a question of 'where have we arrived at' come the time of the summing-up. The ebb and flow of the conversational interaction has essentially determined the outcome.

For the members of HAT, there is a perceived bureaucratic brief to work to, interpreted variously by each of them. Their personal commitment to it is not high however. That, taken together with the often uninteresting material of the meetings and a general feeling that their efforts have a barely noticeable

impact upon the world at large, can provide this condition of entropy within which the words can seem to take over.

A Non-Decision Model?

If we begin to de-emphasize the notion of purpose, either individual or collective, then we also by implication move away from a paradigm of decision-making for understanding group-generated outcomes. To the extent that purpose dissolves, then so does the utility of the concept of choice. Ackoff and Emery (1972) have observed that:

"A purposeful individual can derive (infer) courses of action from his model of a problem situation; that is, the beliefs incorporated into his model can produce a belief about which courses of action are possible and which of these will produce a state of satisfaction. The derivation may be conscious and thus obtained through thought, or it may be unconscious and hence be obtained by intuition. On the other hand, a course of action may be selected by a guess or be chosen arbitrarily (as by a random choice)."

Here, the notion of decision-making requires a purpose and a model of a problem situation that presumably thwarts that purpose. The individual then makes a

choice, reasoned, intuitive or at random. The nature of the problem situation for members of the Housing Assessment Team is difficult to uncover. We have seen that a significant part of their 'purpose' derives from bureaucratic interpretations of their job roles. That is, each member recognises that there is an official task to be completed; but the problem element of that appears to be weak and there is no clear thwarting of purpose that gives rise to choice-making behaviour in Ackoff's sense.

Partial Explanation and Multiple Models

It is important for both consumers and producers of social research to understand the partial nature of the findings that they deal with. We recall Popper's (op. cit.) comment:

"... history must be selective unless it is to be choked by a flood of poor and unrelated material. The attempt to follow causal chains into the remote past would not help in the least, for every concrete effect with which we might start has a great number of partial causes..."

Not only do chains of causality quickly branch and multiply into a myriad strands, but there is also a near infinity of concepts and ideas that can be overlaid onto observed events to give them different

shades and facets of meaning. Bring an idea close to another idea and you will generate a third which both derives from the first two but also adds further meaning to them. We have seen from the present study that, not only can we look at the events of decision-making cases in slightly different ways in order to gain perspective and generate new possibilities for explaining what happened; the individual participants themselves are also able to do the same kind of thing. The process of collecting data from people who hadn't given much thought themselves to the emerging issues of a case or to the reasoning behind their own behaviour is a real example of knowledge in the making.

Our intention throughout this research has been to illuminate empirical events by the use of a particular set of concepts and, at the same time, to elaborate the concepts by bringing them close to data. The process is one of conceptual triangulation, such as Webb (1966) has referred to:

"... no method (with its own built-in limitations) is used exclusively or in isolation; different techniques are combined to throw light on a common problem. Besides viewing the problem from a number of angles, this 'triangulation' approach also facilitates the cross-checking of otherwise tentative findings."

We use the notion of triangulation in a slightly different sense from Webb. It is not just that we are hoping, by employing different concepts quite consciously, to 'catch the data out' and to reveal inconsistencies and gaps that would otherwise be missed; the triangulation is also applied to the meaning of each of the concepts that we use and to the findings that emerge from their use. So that what is meant by personal interest is given further meaning by considering the concept of corporate purpose; what is meant by optimising is informed by thinking about the process of satisficing. This is a not dissimilar idea to that of elaborating a system of constructs (Kelly, 1955).

We move on now to consider, more specifically, the findings that have emerged from having offered up the concepts that comprise the themes of the five analysis chapters to some of the real events of group decision-making behaviour.

8.3. The Utility of Hypergame Analysis

The Presumption of Conflict

Tedeschi, Schlenker and Bonoma (1973) have concluded that:

"Interdependence of outcomes and at least partially opposed interests appear to be ubiquitous in social relationships; hence conflict (of greater or lesser

degree) sets the problem for human interactions. The solutions for such social problems often require the use of various modes of communications. These modes include threats, promises, warnings, and mendations, all of which can be contingent or non-contingent, more or less explicit or tacit, and may refer to specific types and magnitudes of reinforcements, including sensory stimulation, rewards or costs, provision of gains or deprivation of expected gains, and social rewards or punishments."

The two senses of Vickers' use of the concept of conflict are fused here. Tedeschi et al subsume within their meaning both a demonstrable incompatibility of interests and also the forms of behaviour intended to gain advantage. Competition is another term widely used in the literature, with meanings variously over-lapping that of conflict. Deutsch (1969) has defined competition much as others have defined conflict, as:

"an opposition in the goals of the interdependent parties such that the probability of goal attainment for one decreases as the probability for the other increases."

Deutsch then uses the term conflict to refer to incompatible activities rather than incompatible goals.

Game-based models of strategic interaction might be said to be founded upon a paradigm of conflict. Although mixed-motive and co-operative behaviour has been examined under the auspices of game theory, they have been treated rather in terms of deviation from conflict behaviour than as positions in their own right. Many writers on game theory have pointed to what Rapoport (1964) has called its 'inherently non-co-operative tendencies' (also, e.g. Schelling, 1958, 1963; Sandberg, 1976). The dangers of the analyst seeing conflict where there was none have to some extent been recognised, but, even the conflict paradigm has spilled over into many of the more subtle and 'real-life' treatments of organisational politics.

The application of Hypergame concepts to the group processes of the Housing Assessment Team resulted in a degree of 'mis-match' with the empirical conclusions that could be drawn from the data. Although the notion of different players' different perceptions of other significant parties and their aims was illuminating when considered against events, it was not clear that there was any significant strategic behaviour being employed in the particular case being examined. Although the various parties made observations about their own objectives and those of significant others, we were unable to identify instances of premeditated attempts by 'players' to further their objectives.

by consciously constructing a plan of campaign against the prospect of other players' attempts to further their own. The analysis therefore could not proceed beyond the phase of identifying the various participants' perceptions of the other parties in the case. To have moved further into the realm of constructing strategy matrices for each player would have been to produce what could be described as a 'hyperanalysis' of the situation.

Intrinsic Value of the Core Concepts

We argue empirically that formulating the essential concepts of a Hypergame, appreciating the relationship between them and then setting these against the data provides a greater insight than any possible manipulation of strategy matrices. In any case, by far the most problematic and significant part of constructing a model in practice is the attribution of aims, perceived outcomes and preferences to the players.

Bennett himself (1979) has said that the problems of matrix manipulation become prohibitively complex beyond two-player hypergames. He has also implied that the commentary that precedes and surrounds the mathematical analysis is probably more important than the 'analysis' for understanding the dynamics of the situation. This must especially be true if the former

is able to take account both of what individuals have said about the events in which they have participated and, also, some deeper knowledge about what they are like as people. Bauman (1978) has observed that:

"Social phenomena, since they are ultimately acts of men and women, demand to be understood in a different way than by mere explaining. Understanding them must contain an element missing from the explaining of natural phenomena: the retrieval of purpose, of intention, of the unique configuration of thoughts and feelings which preceded a social phenomenon and found its only manifestation, imperfect and incomplete, in the observable consequences of action."

This is essentially a hermeneutic view of understanding which depends upon a degree of personal insight into the character of those involved. This insight doesn't necessarily need to be obtained through direct contact with them although this is almost certainly the best way. The hypergame analyses that have been conducted by Bennett et al (op. cit.) have been relatively poorly informed by this kind of data and sometimes not informed at all. The attribution of aims, perceived outcomes and strategies at a considerable 'distance' has resulted in arguably rather tenuous links between model and reality. Subsequent manipulation of the parameters of the model to provide further 'analyses'

then seem to be academic in the worst colloquial sense of the word.

On the other hand, bringing the essential concepts of the model close both to the events of a case and to what the participants themselves said about those events is enlightening, especially if that process is informed by a reasonable personal knowledge of those participants. Here, the idea of triangulation is invoked and the strategic components of the hypergame throw the material into perspective. This perspective may be gained by an observed correspondence between the model and the data, or by the opposite, where a definite non-matching seems to pertain, or by identifiable degrees of correspondence somewhere between the two. The process runs something akin to the following simple example.

"Well, what colour was it?"

"Difficult to say really. Lightish I suppose."

"Was it a kind of blue?"

"Yes, but not exactly, more greenish than blue."

"More like a turquoise?"

"That's it. It was a light turquoise."

In this example there is a strong correspondence between the starting concept offered up to an 'event' in order to provide a triangulation point for understanding,

and the real character of the data. This character was finally referred to the original notion of blue and somewhere along a scale of lightness and of greenness. This is analogous to the process that we have been adopting throughout this thesis and it is a process in which the Hypergame can undoubtedly be of considerable explanatory value.

Definition of Player Sets

This research has indicated the need for a further conceptual extension of the theory of Hypergames. It is not only intentions, preferences, payoffs and strategies that are subject to individual interpretation. It is also clear, empirically, that the various parties to a strategic interaction will, in general, have individual interpretations of who the rest of the 'players' are. There need not exist any overlap of each players perceived set of opponents although, in practice, there will usually be considerable congruence.

In a Hypergame analysis that would account for this additional complexity, the analyst would presumably be forced to make a judgement about the constitution of the set that he would like to work with. It is possible that the evidence might support the inclusion of a player or players that none of the 'other' participants recognize in their own sets. Closing

off inclusions such as this may, in the end, be a somewhat arbitrary matter.

Definitions of the Situation

Probably the most important contribution that Bennett's model makes to the gaming and conflict literature is to highlight the idea that different participants within a conflict will, in general, have different definitions of the situation. Although this is a well developed notion in Sociology and Social Psychology (see, for example, Berger and Luckman, 1967; Kelly, 1955, 1969; Deutscher, 1973; Harre and Secord, 1973; Cicourel, 1973), strategy analysts have only relatively recently started to operate this precept in practice.

Although Luce and Adams (1956) said that:

"A basic assumption of the theory of games is that each player correctly perceives the payoff functions of the other players. This assumption seems highly unrealistic, and it is dropped in this paper and replaced by the assumption that each player has a perception of the payoff functions of each of the other players; these perceptions may be incorrect ..."

Yet they still constrain their analysis to consideration of a single strategy matrix which they presume the subjects to agree upon. Much later, Schlaim (1976)

made the point that:

"Images, which may be defined as the organised representation of an object in an individual's cognitive system, play an all-important part in the process of making intelligence evaluations. Actors do not respond to the 'objective' facts - whatever that might mean - but to their individual perceptions of reality. Any assessment they make of a situation is bound to be affected in varying degrees by a series of personal images they hold, notably the image of the antagonistic out-group they are combatting."

Schlaim's specific concern was with the competition between national intelligence systems and hence his operating paradigm is one of conflict in all possible senses. Nevertheless, he realised that, in order to predict the behaviour of participants, it was vital for the analyst to understand their own definitions of the situation.

Bennett's beginnings of a bridge building effort between the game analysts and the various disciplines associated with perception and meaning are welcomed. Interestingly, what he has found himself is that pursuance of this line takes him further and further from mathematical definition and manipulation and increasingly closer to the disciplines concerned. It

is likely that this trend will continue if the models that are constructed are required to demonstrate strong correspondences with the empirical world.

8.4 Some Dimensions of Collective Purpose

Bureaucratic Interpretations

It was found in the course of this research that images of collective purpose amongst members of the Housing Assessment Team appeared to derive principally from bureaucratic interpretations of their job roles. The group members were well imbued with the ethos of their parent organisation and were inclined to take their direction from it. We are here using 'bureaucratic' in the Weberian sense (Weber, op. cit.) in which, within a bureaucratic structure:

"... each member of the staff occupies an office with a specific delimitation of powers and a sharp segregation of the sphere of office from his private affairs ... The different offices are organised in terms of a stringent hierarchy of higher and lower levels of authority in such a way that each lower level is subject to control and supervision by the one immediately above it. This control and supervision above all includes the power of appointment, promotion, demotion, and dismissal over the incumbents of lower offices."

Despite the limitations of this traditional model

of organisation, with its emphasis on efficiency and 'rationality' and its lack of attention to individual interests and politics, it is nevertheless, we argue, a very powerful model of institutional life; powerful, not because of any strong support from contemporary organisational theorists, nor yet because it has particular empirical strength as an explainer of behaviour. The principal power of this model is that it represents a pervasive view of how people within organisations perceive their membership of them. To that extent, notions of bureaucracy might be regarded as a self-fulfilling system of concepts. Pettigrew (1973) has noted that:

"The formal structure of power and legitimacy is regarded as problematic ... authority requires to be fortified in interaction. A position may give a leader authority, but the exercise of authority requires interaction. It is at this point that the leader's problems begin."

Whilst we accept the point of these observations, our own data suggest that, in the case of HAT, the formal structure of power and legitimacy is the major source of those two commodities. According to our interpretation of the various comments of the team members, 'the organisation' and institution of Local Government provides most of the direction that can be discerned

in their work. The members themselves also believe that this ought to be the case.

Sub-Bureaucracy

The Housing Assessment Team came to be regarded by its members as a kind of Sub-Bureaucracy in its own right. It was seen to have an official brief that was partly explicit and partly implicit, and each of the members perceived a formal role for himself relative to that brief. It was also possible to identify, for most of the members, a conceptual separation between himself 'the individual' and his membership of the Sub-Bureaucracy. There was a distance between the man and the role.

This conceptual separation or distance was not sharply defined, however; the two 'persona' were blurred at the overlap. They also overlapped with allegiances to each member's departmental activities, the total enterprise of local government and the professional body with which each was associated.

The Sub-Bureaucracy of the Housing Assessment Team wielded less authority over the Team members than did their own individual departments. Although conflicts of interest between the departments were barely identifiable at the level of HAT, save for some more or less good-natured rivalry, the members (except for

R) were not completely at ease with having apparently two directions of responsibility and authority. The operation of the team was made possible by an agreement between Heads of Department that staff time would be made available for this inter-disciplinary activity. The members were of course aware of this agreement, but were still not inclined to spend too much time and energy on a task which was seen as essentially extra-curricula. When the pressure of their own departmental work was high, the demands of the Sub-Bureaucracy that was HAT took a definite second place.

By the same token, the nature of R's 'authority' was tenuous. He was designated the Co-ordinator of the team and that was very much the role that he played, with considerable skill and perspicacity. He was aware that he had no formal authority over the members, yet he was anxious that HAT should achieve results. In this, he managed to succeed, employing a combination of enthusiasm, diplomacy, gentle cajoling, an apparent belief in the cause and a demonstrable willingness to get on with work himself. It was mainly through his efforts that what was initially a rather weakly held together committee became a recognized Sub-Bureaucracy, with an authority of its own and a generally recognized official function.

Professional Membership

The links that the individual members had with their

own professions added stability to the Housing Assessment Team at the same time that they tended to reduce its apparent coherence. These various professional identities allowed members to participate with a sense of independence, of security and with the belief that they each had something unique to contribute to the discussions. Thus was generated a feeling of detached voluntariness which added, paradoxically, to the strength of the group. It could be described not so much as a balance of power, but rather the power that commonly derives from an essentially amateur involvement with an enterprise in which there is not too much work involved and nothing much to lose.

As we have noted, this sense of voluntariness was by no means total since HAT also developed a degree of 'legal' authority in its own right. It is interesting that these two intuitively opposing characteristics somehow remained co-existent.

Non-Bureaucratic Collective Purpose

The cohesion of the team also increased at certain points of interaction with outside parties, notably with the Housing Committee (the official consumer of HAT output) and with 'The Public' (the ultimate clients of the facility the team was set up to provide). Both these groups appeared as common 'adversaries' for the HAT members and generated an occasional sense of

solidarity.

Various definitions of group cohesion, strength, collectiveness and solidarity have been proposed. Many of these bear upon the question of the satisfaction that may or may not exist for the individual in being a member of the group. Zander (op. cit.) has noted that:

"If a member is to be concerned about the achievement of a group that faces a challenging task he must perceive the presence of at least three conditions: (a) that a social unit exists, (b) that he is within that unit rather than outside it, and (c) that events in the group are likely to be relevant to his satisfaction with that group. If these three are present for a person, one may assume that he will be more interested in the outcome of the collective's effort than when they are absent. When these conditions exist for members, the group is said to be strong, one that has unity..."

This is rather a diffuse definition of group strength because it rests upon other difficult definitions. A challenging task, perhaps, is one that can be achieved to the satisfaction of a strong group, if we care to reorganise the ideas somewhat. Yet we can recognise the essence of what Zander is trying to say.

One of the characteristics of the Housing Assessment Team that seems central to how its members behave, however, is that the tasks that it has to carry out are not particularly challenging by any definition that the team members would use. This aspect of the performance of groups is unfortunately given very limited attention in the literature. Much is written about conflicts of interests within groups and the gleeful, strategic pursuit of individual aims; much emphasis is laid upon the efficiency of groups faced with a well-defined task, motivation and satisfaction, trade-offs between individual and group purpose, solidarity and alienation. But relatively little attention has been paid to that most pervasive quality surrounding organisational working units - indifference. We have argued in chapter 5 that in a situation where there is strictly limited concern about the outcomes of a group activity, except within the broadest of parameters, then what actually does transpire may be highly contingent upon the ways in which the discussion unfolds and the whims of the individuals on the day.

Yet, even in such circumstances, it is often not possible to assert that the group is acting in a completely purposeless way. The indifference is never all-pervasive, but becomes a dominating mode which contributors drift in and out of as the interest and the content of the meeting ebbs and flows. Bureaucratic

interpretations of collective purpose come to the fore as and when the subject matter dictates, but so does another kind of aim that has to do with getting the business done and drawing the meeting to a generally acceptable conclusion. When that stage is reached, the members of HAT who are still conversationally active are scanning the content of the contributions for some method of closure, perhaps some further information that 'is required' before they can proceed, a necessary visit to inspect the properties concerned, a phone call to someone or other that one of the members ought to make or, occasionally, a clear agreement about the recommendations to put forward to the committee. As a morning or long afternoon draws on, most of the members will become involved in this collective effort to reach the end of the meeting.

Collective Purpose and Personal Interest

The scope for the personal advancement of members of the Housing Assessment Team is not significantly affected by the activities of the Team. The structure and interdepartmental nature of the relationship with the parent organisation do not leave room for political advantage and there is, therefore, no real reason for political manoeuvring.

Individual competition appeared to be manifest only insofar as it related to the competence of contributions

to specific meetings. The dimension of personal interest apparently operating in such cases was a concern to put on a good performance during the course of the discussions. Competition in this respect was not at all strong, however, and it could not be said to represent a major component of the dynamics of the team.

A coincidence of personal interest and collective purpose appeared to be represented by the members' recognition that the business of HAT was something that they were all landed with and that it was in all their interests that it be conducted as quickly and pleasantly as possible with a minimum of heated disagreement.

Zander (op. cit.) has observed that:

"There has been a long standing interest in explaining why a member attends to the goodness of his group's effort. With few exceptions ... these explanations have been based on the assumption that he personally will benefit if his group performs well. Many studies therefore have attempted to identify conditions that facilitate individual gains for a member or make him believe these gains will occur ... Yet, it is easy to think of instances in which a person works hard for his group when there is not the slightest possibility of personal gain and even, in the extreme case, when

such effort may reduce or eliminate rewards he might have received. It is difficult to understand the intentions of such members without assuming some form of motivation that is primarily focused on the outcomes of the group - a more or less selfless concern with the achievement of the group as a unit."

The present research has indicated the operation of motives, if such they can be called, which are neither totally self-interested nor whole-heartedly 'groupy'. Principal amongst these has been a willingness to attend to the bureaucratic definitions of what the group 'ought' to be doing. Commitment to these definitions is not absolute however, and boredom and indifference can set in with rather unpredictable effects upon the group outcomes. We consider now some of the conclusions that can be drawn about the determinants that can come into play when this occurs.

8.5 The Leader-Driver: Some Dimensions of Non-Purpose

In chapter 5, we formulated some categories of discussion dynamics that help to explain certain kinds of outcome generated by decision-making groups when their sense of direction is rather weak. These categories were:

- (i) Critical Elapsed Sequences
- (ii) Stock Polarities and Agreements
- (iii) Discounted Standpoints
- (iv) Novel Standpoints
- (v) Extraordinary Commitment

Critical Elapsed Sequences were conceived as strings of contributions in which the probability of each element being introduced appears to be strongly determined by the contribution or contributions immediately preceding it.

Stock Polarities are special cases of this phenomenon in which particular pairs of contributions are apt to turn up together, often representing either polarised views or concurrent views.

Discounted Standpoints were taken to denote discussion clichés, peculiar to the group, that tend to be disregarded or to carry much reduced impact by virtue of their familiarity.

Novel Standpoints were seen to represent the obverse of Discounted Standpoints, being contributions that appeared to carry extra weight by virtue of their newness.

Extraordinary Commitment was said to be present when a special enthusiasm from one of the members stood out against a characteristic background of ennui and thereby carried discussion off in its own direction.

All of these propositions have been suggested by a prolonged involvement with the meetings of the Housing

Assessment Team and are supported by particular examples. They are argued to represent some of the 'internal forces' of a discussion and to be particularly potent when other, essentially external, determinants relating to purpose are not operating strongly or at all.

The model of discussion upon which such notions are implicitly founded resembles, in simplistic terms, a game of dominos in which each player has a limited set of pieces that he can set down, but these can only be played when certain other pieces are laid by someone else. Bales (1950) has classified different types of contribution that can be made in small problem-solving groups and he links some of these behaviours as likely to occur together. But what we are suggesting here is that the content matter of discussion may be serially determined by association.

Separating the effects of intentions from this kind of process is an almost impossible task in practice and, indeed, a certain class of intentions could be said to operate even in driving this sequencing. Such intentions relate to the support of particular points of view, opinions and ideas rather than to the satisfaction of more tangible goals. Critical Elapsed Sequences sometimes occur, for example, to bend the meaning attributed to a particular contribution

towards a different meaning preferred by the respondent. Similarly, Stock Polarities may represent opposing positions adopted by two contributors and Stock Agreements may indicate two strong beliefs in the same principle.

Extraordinary Commitment is a category which is dimensionally distinct from the other four. In a sense, it could be said to represent pockets of enthusiasm which stand out against the background of relative non-purpose that accentuates the appearance of the other, language-based categories. This enthusiasm can still be unintentional, however, generated by a particular juxtaposition of ideas, a sudden mood, a whim, a burst of inspiration or merely a desire to relieve a prevailing level of boredom.

An important finding of this research has been a recognition of the surprisingly high levels of 'un-intention' that can exist during the process of meetings of decision-making groups such as HAT. We argued in chapter 5 that models of group interaction based upon political formulations of objectives and behaviour need to be applied judiciously, particularly at the lower levels of organisation hierarchies. Indeed, it could be said that the 'political' position and, conversely, one that takes a more undirected view of organisational interaction are each based upon fundamentally different paradigms concerning

how individuals relate to their working lives. Implicit in the first model is an essentially materialist view of occupational satisfaction, whereas the second recognizes that the contract that an individual may strike with his organisation does not anticipate or necessarily value the successes or advantages that can be derived from 'political' awareness and competence.

Although we are not concerned here with the ethics of organisational behaviour, we are interested in the values adopted by those who engage in analysis and commentary upon organisations. This is an important part of tracing the lineage of the concepts that they use and the conclusions that they draw. For those that would follow and interpret the results of the present research, it is important to realise that we would incline to emphasize what we have referred to as the pathos of organisational life as much as, and probably more than, the potential rewards of the cut and thrust of its politics.

8.6 Some Characteristics of Personal Interest

Whilst we have argued in chapter 6 that Personal Interest could take many forms for the individual, the results of our empirical study indicate the importance of organisationally oriented definitions. We have found that aspects of an individual's purpose-directed

behaviour that have to do with satisfactions relating to himself rather than to 'goals' of the organisation may nevertheless be expressed in terms of his well-being within that organisation. We have alluded to this characteristic in considering 'the pathos of bureaucracy', a feeling that the paid official is never really able to liberate himself from the definitions of himself provided by and through his involvement with his organisation.

This became apparent when we were able to obtain data on both R's and E's views on their own interests with respect to the continuing operation of the Housing Assessment Team. The categories expressed were, almost without exception, dimensions of well-being pertinent to their everyday working lives within Local Government in general and as part of HAT in particular. Since these categories were covered in some depth in chapter 6, we do not propose to reconsider them here. A number of more general points stand out for comment however.

First, it was clear that the positions of R and E with respect to the Housing Assessment Team were different, in terms of personal interests, from those of the other members. R, in particular, had a considerable portion of his job and professional identity tied up with the operation of HAT.

Second, the categories of interest articulated by R could be described in the sort of terms normally associated with the pursuit of political advantages. That is, they all had to do with improving his status, working standard of life, prospects and salary. In all cases the real scope for improvement was slight, however, and it is arguable how powerful these factors would be in any political action that involved a significant degree of personal conflict or unpleasantness.

Third, these personal interest factors only emerged for discussion when a public inquiry forced R and E to justify some of their recommendations and, also, the existence of HAT to parties outside the usual circle of their work. Significant for R was the possibility of HAT being discontinued at the end of its experimental term and he was forced, therefore, to consider the disagreeable implications of this possibility.

Finally, despite R's particular interest in the continuation of the team, he always conducted the business and his handling of the other members on a co-operative basis and not obviously as leader or manager. Whether that policy stemmed from an intuitive or considered notion of the most effective likely approach or whether it was merely part of the gentlemanly culture of Local Government Officers was difficult to

say. It was never apparent within the meetings, however, that R had any particular axe to grind.

The balance of attention that is deemed to be 'proper' to devote to the pursuit of personal well-being is an interesting issue. The economic contract that individuals make or imply with their organisation, the extent to which they feel dependent upon that, the Puritan Ethic pervasive as a background presence within the world of organisations, all lend a kind of schizophrenia to organisation man which is usually deeply imbedded. When you come to ask him about his aims and aspirations and about the objectives of his part of the institution, these ideas merge and blend in the reply. Ambitions are perhaps at first expressed in the jargon of career progression, then later, and more tentatively, might be an admission of some more personally material goal, a small cottage in the country, a caravan in which to get away from whatever it all is, a holiday in Greece. On the one hand, is a natural aspiration for these 'just compensations', at the same time there is often a hint of a layer of guilt for mentioning them out loud. The problem for the researcher is that a person will normally take a considerable time to reveal what it is that keeps him driving along, or rather what he thinks some of his important motives are. The situation is of course desperately complex. Maslow (op. cit.) has

observed that:

"Man is a wanting animal and rarely reaches a state of complete satisfaction except for a short time. As one desire is satisfied, another pops up to take its place. When this is satisfied, still another comes into the foreground, etc. It is a characteristic of the human being throughout his whole life that he is practically always desiring something. We are faced then with the necessity for studying the relationships of all the motivations to each other and we are concomitantly faced with the necessity of giving up the motivational units in isolation if we are to achieve the broad understanding that we seek for."

What we have observed in this study is not only that the aims and motives operating within the context of a particular decision-making group are difficult to separate, but also that two seemingly important dimensions, collective purpose and personal interest, merge in a complex way. More specifically, the Personal Interest that often underpins 'political' models of organisational behaviour may be conceived by the individual in terms of what he does and what he can do within the organisation rather than what he might imagine being able to do as a hypothetical free agent outside it. It is in this sense that corporate purpose and individual purpose may not be at

odds. The limits of discourse and possibility can be similar in both cases. The irony of the political analysis, though, is that it tends to attribute degrees of freedom to the individual as he cunningly manoeuvres his way through the maze of the institution. The cage outside the cage, unfortunately, our very modest, modern, Machiavelli may not be able to see.

8.7. Satisficing Behaviour

Our research has shown that, in one sense, satisficing behaviour could be said to characterise most decision-making situations of complexity, since there is rarely the time or the resources to be able to amass all the data that could have a bearing upon the outcome. This was true of the standards that the members of the Housing Assessment Team applied to their cases and it was a well-accepted principle that they were always looking for workable solutions to the Housing problems that came before them.

There was a difference between the members' acceptance of this principle and the way in which satisficing appeared to be regarded by a 'non-professional' decision-maker involved with the case outlined in chapter 7. The latter tended to view sub-optimal choice as a pathological state even though he was not in a position, and had no inclination, to work

out the 'very best' plan to follow. However, the professional decision-makers had, perforce, come to terms with what they could practically hope to achieve and had learned to promulgate amongst significant others the acceptance of standards that could easily be met. Their working set of values was so arranged that, for the most part, they were seen to be getting useful things done rather than to be always falling short of what could in theory be done.

The amateur decision-maker, Mr. B, did not perceive in the same way that he could exercise control over the standards of achievement. As a small business man, perhaps, he had more reason to judge choice selection against an abstract ideal. To some extent better decisions for him would mean better progress. Neither did he have the background of operating within an organisation in which judgements are apt to be evaluated by peers as a matter of course. This exposure develops the kind of caution and the ability to define standards that the HAT members take for granted.

An important characteristic of the satisficing behaviour that we have observed has been a tendency to respond to problematic events contingently rather than strategically. As part of the acceptance of sub-optimal standards there is often a tendency to put problems off until later and wait to see what happens.

Optimising behaviour, on the other hand, might dictate a more proactive stance in which difficult situations were predicted and pre-empted, or else a sound strategy for their disposal drawn up in good time. In the case of B's garage, both Mr B and R were quite happy to leave events to determine their actions and to wait until the other had responded before they thought about what to do next.

We have tried, in the course of this thesis, to develop a number of distinct yet interlocking themes. In a sense, these serve to chart the progress of incremental thinking that has taken place over a number of years, thinking that has led off in various directions as important issues and questions have made themselves felt. Ours has been essentially a dual concern, but in the end the duality has come together to provide a coherent, even scientific basis for some propositions about the nature of certain aspects of decision-making behaviour in groups at work.

This duality reflects concurrent interests in both the process of social research and the substantive content of ideas that can derive from it. An important argument of this thesis has been that these two areas are inextricably linked in a number of important ways. Perhaps the most significant point could be summarised by saying that we believe that in order to say that we have knowledge about a particular subject of research then we must have access to both the ideas and language that constitute the research output and, also, the process that generated the output. This is not to say that any particular method of inquiry is valued, per se, more highly than any other, although we would certainly be prepared to make some judgements on that subject.

The argument is rather that we do not know the essence of the product of research if we do not know something about both the method and the mind that gave rise to it. It is in these terms that our notion of a scientific inquiry has come to be based.

This is a well established position in the philosophy of science, but it is interpreted variously in the natural sciences and even more variously in the social sciences. We have intentionally steered away from much of this debate, except that surrounding those specific issues that seem to be important as a foundation for our own chosen methodology and model of knowledge. The debate is endless, in any case. All good researchers should engage in it from time to time to sharpen, develop and update their ideas about what it is they believe they are doing. But none should let a realisation of the tenuous nature of the castle of part-formed precepts and assumptions that contains his knowledge prevent him from going out and getting some more. There is much to discover and communicate, no more so than in the world of organisations.

Indeed, at no time has it been more important that knowledge about organisations be readily accessible to those that participate within them. This is true whether you are arguing from the point of view of efficiency and productivity, whether you are concerned

to make organisations better places in which to live or whether you are supporting a plea for a greater equality that depends upon an improved access to knowledge about the structure of their organisational world for those destined to live out their lives there.

Our own presentation has been intended to be both academic and accessible. By presenting some of the raw material of empirical data alongside the commentary and discussion, we have hoped to make more explicit the origins of the conclusions that have been drawn. We have also hoped to convey knowledge of a different kind than that we have put together by reasoning, knowledge that rests upon the reader being able to pick out some instant truth from the stories we have presented.

Damian Grant (1970), writing about realism, has observed that:

"Truth may be seen as either scientific or poetic; discovered by a process of knowing or created by a process of making. The first is technically referred to as the correspondence theory, and the second as the coherence theory.

The correspondence theory is empirical and epistemological. It involves a naive or common-sense realist

belief in the reality of the external world (as expressed in Dr. Johnson's kicking a stone to prove that matter exists) and supposes that we may come to know this world by observation and comparison. The truth it proposes is the truth that corresponds, approximates to the predicted reality, renders it with fidelity and accuracy ...

In the coherence theory, on the other hand, the epistemological process is accelerated or elided by intuitive perception. Truth is not earned by the labour of documentation and analysis but coined, a ready synthesis, and made current - as in any currency - by confidence, 'the confidence of truth.' Evidence is replaced by self-evidence."

In Grant's terms, the basis of the knowledge obtained from our own research depends upon both the correspondence theory and the coherence theory. On the one hand, the only way in which we can examine the efficacy and insight provided by a particular set of concepts is to try and establish a correspondence between the concepts and the events that constitute our empirical data. Yet, in the end, the links between particular pieces of data and things that are said about them will only be evaluated by coherence. A different commentator might disagree with particular links, and assert, for example:

"I don't think that's true. What R's comment suggests to me is that ..."

At the same time, if we consider Grant's interpretation of the concept of coherence to have some truth, then the presentation of some of the data in the form of conversations and quotations may give new meaning to the reader beyond the scope of the discussion that we have provided. We have had both these intentions in mind.

Turning now to the substantive findings of this research, let us reconsider the part-formed hypothesis that started it all off. An important concern in devising the present programme was to try and illuminate some of the more humdrum, unspectacular determinants of group decision-making. This was, in part, a reaction to some of the political and strategic analyses of organisational life that were themselves reactions to the unreal models proposed by various forms of systems analysis. These dry formulations tended to reify the organisations they described, they assumed a broad congruence of purpose for the participant individuals and concerned themselves with notions of efficiency and productivity.

But everybody knew that there was more to organisations than that, and so models were developed which accounted

for conflict, ambition, power, politics and all those facets of real life which investigators recognised as important, but didn't think it quite proper to theorise about.

The result, in our view, was a swing in the other direction. The cut and thrust models seemed to miss out the routine dreariness, the limited commitment, the 9 to 5 syndrome, the pathos of all the millions of organisation people doing their bit in return for a meagre salary and doing it to the best of their ability when their mind was not wandering somewhere else, or they were getting bored, or just waiting for the weekend to come. It is a part of that ordinary yet pervasive context that we have been concerned to examine. We have attempted not to go overboard with this theme and have chosen to consider a spectrum of concepts that bear upon both strategic and non-strategic behaviour. We highlight the incidence of conflict in some cases and de-emphasise or refute it in others. We have paid attention to situations where there are relatively strong intentions and where there hardly appear to be any at all. We have looked at dimensions of corporate purpose and of personal interest.

An important guiding principle for our method of research has been to become partly involved with the work of the Housing Assessment Team and to get close

enough to the members over a long enough period of time so as to be able to understand some of the meanings that they give to the behaviour of others and which, we presume, informs their own action. We agree with Goffman (1961), who summed up the process rather neatly:

"It is my belief that any group of persons - prisoners, primitives, pilots or patients - develop a life of their own that becomes meaningful, reasonable and normal once you get close to it, and that a good way to learn about any of these worlds is to submit oneself in the company of the members to the daily round of petty contingencies to which they are subject."

Perhaps the only way to really understand a piece of action is to participate in it yourself. But, to theorise about it, you also have to be able to see what you have been doing. It has been our intention to steer some kind of middle course between involvement and distance. In the same way, we have hoped to achieve a balance between correspondence and coherence, science and history, strategy and non-strategy, conflict and harmony. We have examined a number of different points of view which, in the end, all depend upon each other for their meaning.

10 GENERAL THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS AND SOME DIMENSIONS OF PROCESS AND CONTEXT

10.1 Conclusions for Group Decision Making

Our research connects with a number of important traditions of thinking about decision-making in groups and organisations. Perhaps the most established is the social psychological body of knowledge, rooted firmly in experimental investigations. Many of these have been based upon the social and linguistic dynamics that operate in decision-making groups attempting to reach a consensus (Black, 1948; Burnstein and Vinokur, 1975; Deutsch and Gerard, 1955; Festinger, Schachter and Back, 1959). Particularly important concepts have been attitude changed (Anderson and Farkas, 1973; Gough and Fraser, 1972; Moscovici and Zavalloni, 1969; Schonback, Gollwitzer, Stiepel and Wagner, 1981), exchange theory (Homans, 1958; Chadwick-Jones, 1976), the structure of argumentation (Thorndike, 1938; Vinokur and Burnstein, 1974; Axelrod, 1976), reactions to risk (Vinokur, 1969, 1971), linguistic style and persuasion (Festinger and Thibaut, 1950; Sandell, 1977; Vinokur, Trope and Burnstein, 1975) and various measures of group shifts (Burnstein and Vinokur, 1973; Kogan and Wallach, 1967; Stoner, 1968; Vinokur and Burnstein, op.cit.). Many of the results in this field have been derived empirically from the study of groups engaged in variations of the theme of 'problem-solving'. Recently, however, Davis and Hinsz (1982) have observed that:

"Almost any area of research having to do with the collective performance of a set of persons working at a task was at one time called 'group problem solving'. According to at least one system of group task classification (Davis, 1969a), problem solving tasks emphasize the processing of information in order to formulate an answer, and may be contrasted with decision-making tasks which emphasize less a construction of some response than a specification of one alternative out of several defined by the task. Such a system, of course, is largely a matter of convenience and cannot easily be maintained in strict logical form."

Davis and Hinsz's last point is important and we would also argue that any distinction between problem-solving and decision-making is difficult to draw in practice. The two might be said to be paradigms for analysis rather than empirically observable categories of behaviour. In these terms, our own work has perhaps been grounded more firmly in the problem paradigm than the decision paradigm, even though it is a concept of 'group decision' that we have been concerned to investigate and develop.

The location of sources of intention for group members has been given little explicit coverage in the social psychological literature. The authority for and rightness of problem-solving or decision-making tasks has tended to remain an assumption of group studies rather than be

treated as an important explanatory variable. Our own research, on the other hand, has been concerned to highlight how members of a problem solving group construe both the content and the source of the issues set before them. The pervasive nature of bureaucratic models of organisational purpose has been demonstrated and some of the substance of such models elaborated.

Another important finding of the present research is that for decision-making groups concerned with relatively non-traumatic tasks, a process of 'content manufacturing' is often central to their activities. That is, in response to a bureaucratic demand to address a particular work issue, group members at a meeting will begin to generate material in the form of ideas, comments, arguments, pros and cons, notes agendas, timetables, tasks and so on. The resulting web of content not only develops a life and coherence of its own, but may also inspire standards and criteria for its evaluation. This important process of manufacture has been neglected in social psychology. Content has tended to be regarded as given in experimental group studies and treated as the subject matter for processes which they have attempted to uncover.

This concept of manufacture has also received scant attention in the literature of organisation theory. Perhaps the closest approach to it has been the formulation proposed by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972). They have

viewed organisational decision-making as an anarchic kind of process:

"Although organisations can often be viewed conveniently as vehicles for solving well-defined problems or structures within which conflict is resolved through bargaining, they also provide sets of procedures through which participants arrive at an interpretation of what they are doing and what they have done while in the process of doing it. From this point of view, an organisation is a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer and decision makers looking for work."

Cohen, March and Olsen develop a model of organisational decision-making which is characterised by the idea of there being an abundance of content to begin with. They argue that series of decision situations that arise within an organisation can be seen as 'garbage cans' that attract issues and participants according to the identifying labels that they come to acquire. Cohen, March and Olsen stress the idea of a stream process in which elements that end up in one garbage can are not then available to be placed in any of the others.

This model is simplistic in a number of ways. A central assumption is that organisations in which this kind of decision-making occurs are essentially anarchic. Cohen,

March and Olsen see organisational behaviour as fragmented, where participants operate on the basis of a variety of ill-defined and inconsistent preferences, where its own operating processes are not understood by its members and where these members vary considerably in the amount of time and effort that they devote to different issues. Accordingly:

"... the boundaries of the organisation are uncertain and changing; the audiences and decision makers for any particular kind of choice change capriciously."

Much of the research upon which the garbage can model has been based was carried out within Universities. These are organisations notable for the high degrees of freedom perceived by their members to define rules and standards of behaviour. They are therefore highly likely to exhibit certain anarchic characteristics. Concentration upon this idea draws attention away from much stronger perceptions of order to be found in many other kinds of organisation. The reference concept of an organised anarchy is inappropriate for many decision making situations.

The present research has pointed to the importance of bureaucratic interpretations of organisational purpose and meaning, the very antithesis of anarchy. Within the middle ranks of Local Government, meanings relating to job roles and corporate direction are handed down to the officers

from above, handed down and also accepted, for the most part, as being official, validated by those that are presumed to know what they are doing and where they are going. Participants within the organisation realise that policy is not always clearly set out; they can recognise that inconsistencies and stupidities can and do occur - after all, people are only human - they observe that those above them can sometimes be argued to be incompetent and self-interested. But, through all this, there still remains a constant, underlying belief in the rightness and officialness of it all. There is a strong sense of duty to the objectives of the organisation, whatever particular individuals believe them to be. Our middle ranking decision-makers have been seen to operate with a highly Weberian notion of organisation.

A second important weakness of the garbage can model of corporate decision-making lies with its tenet that the raw material of the process is somehow there to start with and that issues are gradually settled as this content is sorted under the various headings. This is to ignore the manufacturing of content that is such a fundamental part of group decision-making and that our research has brought out for consideration.

Within another view of the organisational theory literature, Bachrach and Baratz (1963) have been concerned to highlight political processes by which community and policy issues

are effectively decided at a high level through the management of publicly accessible meaning (Pettigrew, 1977) so that consumers of outcomes are not even aware that a decision as such has been taken. Bachrach and Baratz observed that:

"Many investigators have also mistakenly assumed that power and its correlatives are activated and can be observed only in decision-making situations. They have overlooked the equally, if not more important area of what might be called 'nondecision-making', i.e. the practice of limiting the scope of actual decision-making to 'safe' issues by manipulating the dominant community values, myths, and political institutions and procedures. To pass over this is to neglect one whole face of power."

Bachrach and Baratz refer to a state of 'false consensus' in which members of a given population appear to stand in agreement about the rightness of the current state of affairs without being aware that an opportunity existed for a different state to pertain. This is a similar idea to the Marxian notion of false consciousness and to Lukes' Three-Dimensional View of Power which focuses upon the way in which political agendas may be controlled (Lukes, 1974).

The uncritical acceptance by Local Government officers of bureaucratic interpretations of corporate purpose

might be said to represent a particular example of false consensus. However, it can also be argued that this concept is rather difficult to validate. Merelman (1968) has criticised what he refers to as the Neo-Elitist Critique of Community Power exemplified by Bachrach and Baratz (op.cit.), Schattschneider (1960), Vidich and Bensman (1960) and Oppenheim (1961). He argues that:

"The argument on the problem of 'false consensus', as it is presently stated, is not an empirical argument, though it makes certain dubious empirical assumptions. Rather, it is a purely deductive, tautological theory which, if one accepts its empirical assumptions, does not admit of empirical proof or disproof ... the argument does not allow us to distinguish between 'real' and 'false' consensuses."

Whether or not false consensus is a viable concept is not our concern here, however. The present research has not attempted to trace the lineage of particular images of organisations held by participants. Rather, a widely held view of how a corporate enterprise functions has emerged as we have examined the case studies of this thesis. Nevertheless, it was our intention to investigate the relative applicability of bureaucratic and politically oriented models of organisation, particularly at middle management levels within the hierarchy. On this question, Pfeffer (1981) has noted:

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"Distinguishing between the bureaucratic and political models of organisation may be somewhat more difficult. After all, if the distribution of power is stable in the organisation, which is a reasonable assumption, particularly over relatively short time periods, and if power and politics determine organisational decisions, then organisational choices will be relatively stable over time. But this stability is also characteristic of the use of precedent in decision-making, which is one of the hallmarks of bureaucratic organisations."

Pfeffer here makes the mistake of assuming that bureaucratic and political explanations of organisational behaviour need to be kept separate. He also frames his analytical terms from his, the analyst's, point of view. One of the important arguments of this thesis has been that it is vital to consider the models of their organisation being used by the members themselves.

So that, whatever systemic structure or political characteristics might be attributed to this particular section of Local Government from the outside, we have attempted to uncover the inside view. We have shown that bureaucratic models of their institution are widely held by the members, particularly away from the higher, discretionary levels of management and particularly where the members also belong to a profession which tends to emphasize community and vocational values.

We have also endeavoured to contrast these essentially Weberian representations of members' participation in decision-making with various political models which lay stress upon individuals' self-interest and the scope for competition, conflict and the diverse interpretation of goals. Such models can, in certain circumstances, mislead from what is, fundamentally, a strong sense of cohesion.

At the same time, we have pointed out that real commitment to organisational goals can in practice be severely limited and that routine decision-making tasks in particular may be accompanied by high levels of boredom and marked indifference to the outcomes. In recognizing such indifference, we have pointed to a kind of non-decision making that is fundamentally different to that conceived by either Cohen, March and Olsen (op.cit.) or Bachrach and Baratz (op.cit.). It is a process in which the participants are themselves aware that they are engaged in a kind of decision-making task for their organisation, this self-subsuming institution to which they owe a duty and which has corporate goals which they are more or less clear about and which they believe themselves to be more or less agreed upon.

By non-decision making in this context, we mean to say that the process is not characterised by the rational enumeration and comparison of alternatives, and their systematic evaluation against well-formulated criteria;

nor by the stream sorting of issues into garbage cans. Rather is one in which decision-making type content is manufactured 'on site' in response to an official call for choice, and in which a group such as HAT will generate contributions, ideas, arguments and options as it goes along. This process will exhibit a degree of serial dependence and what is generated at any point in time will be inextricably linked to what has gone before.

10.2 Decision-Making in the Local Government Setting

In the analysis and presentation of our research, the context to the decision-making has been considered through the auspices, as it were, of the participants themselves. We have, through the variety of data obtained and employed, attempted to build up a picture of how the individuals in particular cases perceived the immediate and wider situation of which they were a part. A number of specific issues, however, peculiar perhaps to the Local Government context, can be identified for particular consideration. These largely have to do with an essentially structural view of the decision-making process.

Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood (1980, 1982) have been amongst those who have chosen to concentrate upon the analysis of organisational structure and its relationship with the generation of events. In particular, they have adopted what is essentially an evolutionary model of

organisation in which, over time, institutions adapt to and are contingent upon the circumstances that they have encountered in history. Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood (1980) point out that:

"The concept of structure is usually understood to imply a configuration of activities that is characteristically enduring and persistent; the dominant feature of organisational structure is its patterned regularity. Yet descriptions of structure have typically focused on very different aspects of such patterned regularity. Some have sought to describe structure as a formal configuration of roles and procedures, the prescribed framework of the organisation. Others have described structure as the patterned regularities and processes of interaction ... The continual counterposing of framework and interaction is unhelpful because of its implicit and inaccurate opposition of 'constraint' to 'agency'. The recent works of Bourdieu (1971, 1977, 1979) and Giddens (1976, 1977) suggest a more fruitful perspective, focusing upon the interpenetration of framework and interaction as expressing a relationship that is often mutually constituting and constitutive."

This relationship essentially exists in the idea that interaction can only take place between individuals, that these individuals have perceptions of the structure that surrounds them and that they attribute various meanings to what they perceive. We have, in the present

research, highlighted a particular way that members of an organisation perceive structure. We have also pointed out that, whatever the empirical, predictive validity of a structural, Weberian model of organisational participation, the fact of participants believing in many of its essential characteristics reinforces bureaucratic behaviour. However, Ranson et al (op.cit.) seem more inclined to think of structure as a strictly analytical device to which the participants are in no sense party:

"The properties of structural frameworks have important consequences for the organisation's effectiveness: the extent of functional differentiation, the degree of integration, connectedness, and 'coupling', the centralisation and concentration of authority, the formalisation of rules and procedures, etc. will influence the effectiveness of control."

This is essentially a Weberian analysis from the analyst's point of view. We argue, however, that bureaucratic models are also important for those being analysed and, hence, have an important impact upon the nature and detail of organisational interaction. It is in this way that structure eventually has its determining effect upon action. Ranson et al go on to say that:

"Much comparative research in organisational analysis has in fact examined the contextual determinants of structural variability in organisations. This has

become known as the 'argument from contingencies' (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967) which suggests that the relationship of structural characteristics to be found in any organisation - the particular constellation of rules, differentiated labour and hierarchy, for example - arises because of the pressure of contingent or situational circumstances."

Here, apparently, is another level of cause and effect, where that which is deemed by the analyst to lie outside the organisation he is looking at provides a determining force upon the structure of the organisation itself. But how does this evolution take place? Not, presumably, by a mysterious, impersonal process of osmosis. Contingency forces are activated by individuals within the organisation who are able to gauge the extent of any perceived mismatch between what they might regard as the external environment and the structure of the system of which they are a part. It is the subjective delineation of context and the meaning it assumes that will eventually result in changes of structure.

Of course, for Local Government in particular, certain elements of context are strongly established both by statute and tradition. Friend and Jessop (1969) have observed that:

"Any form of planning activity by a local authority must

take place within a procedural setting which is laid down in the standing orders of Council, and in the more specific instructions to individual committees. Although each local authority has a measure of autonomy in developing these procedures within the legal constitution of the local government system, no local rules of procedure can in themselves do more than provide a basic framework within which groups and individuals can act. Inevitably, certain patterns of behaviour and expectation evolve which tend to become an integral part of the local government system even though they have no official procedural basis."

This is another structuralist argument of a similar genre to that of Ranson, Hinings and Greenwood (op.cit.), although with an explicit reference to the particular way in which legal forces can determine behaviour. There is a presumption here that the scope for interpretation and construction of such institutions as standing orders is slight. Nevertheless, the vital process by which participants derive meaning from the structures that they perceive is not examined.

Saunders (1979) is more thorough in this respect:

"It has become a sociological cliché that the formal structure of an organisation does not necessarily indicate what actually goes on within it, and there is no reason to expect that local authorities constitute an exception to this. Both functionalist (eg Blau, 1963) and

interactionist (eg Silverman, 1970) approaches to the sociology of formal organisations have stressed the need to examine how members routinely accomplish their 'roles', and it follows that the analysis of the formal organisational framework of local authority decision-making can only be a first step in understanding how policies come to be made."

The present research has considered the context to the decision-making of the Housing Assessment Team in essentially the same way as other kinds of data. Analytical categories that might be otherwise subsumed under the general heading of context have emerged and been treated in the accounts collected from members. We pick out a few of these categories here for specific consideration.

First, it was an important part of Housing Policy that conversion of marginal properties was to be preferred to new construction. This factor was apt to place constraints upon the range of options that could be considered by HAT members to be feasible. This policy of renewal had its roots both in financial and architectural issues. It had historically been the case that the improvement of existing buildings was normally a cheaper option, unit for unit, than demolishing and reconstructing from scratch. This practice had lingered on, even in the face of the relative increase of labour costs over material costs which now meant that, in some instances, new construction would be a less expensive alternative to adopt.

Overlaid upon the simple budget questions were issues of quality. There was, and still is a strong presumption in most quarters of Local Government in the city - amongst officers, councillors of all parties, the public at large - that the conservation of the city's architectural and cultural heritage was fundamentally, per se, a good thing. Which parts of the heritage are deemed to be valuable and which of lesser significance is a more contentious question, but the general acceptance of the policy of conservation works against demolition and favours the practice of conversion. There is also the point that with smaller conversion schemes, it is often relatively easy for ways to be found of mobilizing private capital, which is another important working principle within the Housing Department.

A second important contextual factor was a gradual diminution in the real value of the housing budget. This tended to work against large, ambitious construction plans in favour of relatively inexpensive piecemeal conversions. The time horizon of the work was also being gradually reduced as a matter of policy; that is, standards of construction were being pared and building work was being carried out that had a shorter and shorter life expectancy. As is often the case when budgets are under pressure, the long term had started to become less important than the short term.

A third important element of context for the decision-

making of the Housing Assessment Team was the existence, and continuing strength, of local conservation pressure groups. One of these in particular was well organised and run by articulate people who had access to professional skills and technical advice of all kinds. The presence of such groups was a determinant of the range of 'solution' options that members of HAT felt able to raise.

Finally, we point again to the kind of organisation we were looking at and the location of the HAT members within its hierarchy. There is a clear difference between the culture and constitution of, say, a University and that of a Local Government department. There is a tradition within Universities of freedom in how members interpret their job roles. This is not the case within Local Authorities. Our subjects for this research were all middle management officers, also, and not accustomed to the more discretionary behaviour that is to be found higher up the scale.

Recognizing as we do the importance of considering contextual variables in the analysis of organisational decision-making, our focus in the present research has been with the process of decision-making interaction and we have treated context, along with the other data, through the meanings attributed to it by the participants concerned. In this we differ from most other analysts of Local Government decision-making. Structuring context variables around the central issues of this thesis, however,

would not change the outcomes of the research as it was conceived and designed.

In the next and last section, we move on to consider briefly some theoretical questions which finally set our research in the context, so to speak, of a range of possible systems of analysis.

10.3 Some Analytical Questions

Pettigrew (1979) has argued that:

"In the pursuit of our everyday tasks and objectives, it is all too easy to forget the less rational and instrumental, the more expressive social tissue around us that gives those tasks meaning. Yet in order for people to function within any given setting, they must have a continuing sense of what that reality is all about in order to be acted upon. Culture is the system of such publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, forms, categories and images interprets a people's own situation to themselves."

We have not, in the present research, been concerned explicitly with the concept of culture. We have, however, been interested in uncovering meanings accepted by a particular decision-making group, meanings that relate to the members' sense of direction with respect to the

perceived goals of the organisation of which they are a part. We have attempted to define empirically and to elaborate a number of important concepts that bear upon a sense both of individual and corporate direction.

The case study chapters of the thesis have each dealt with a particular concept. In developing the notion of the Hypergame in chapter 3 we focused upon some aspects of strategic conflict. We considered the efficacy and authenticity of models of strategy in the particular context of the case. Strategic behaviour was differentiated from non-strategic behaviour and conflict juxtaposed with co-operation.

In treating the idea of Collective Purpose in chapter 4, we aimed to uncover some of the ways in which corporate goals could be formulated by a particular group of organisation members. This development built upon the previous chapter to the extent that dimensions of Collective Purpose had been seen to operate within the frame of a Hypergame.

The Leader-Driver model in chapter 5 was a formulation to explain the phenomenon we have referred to as the manufacture of decision-making content. In this model we de-emphasize the importance of intention and instead posit a situation in which discussions in response to an official call for choice develop a life and logic of their own.

In looking at the concept of Personal Interest in chapter 6, we aimed to take further one of the important elements of strategic interaction, comparing it at the same time with the ideas on Collective Purpose developed in chapter 4. Our contention has been that it is not possible to understand the notion of, for example, Personal Interest without reference to other kinds of interest such as Collective Purpose.

The final case in chapter 7 was concerned to investigate the concept of satisficing originally proposed by Simon and forming such an important adjunct to the idea of optimising implied by strategic formulations of organisational interaction.

Our intention, then, has been to develop a web of important ideas, each of which represents in itself an important facet of behaviour and each adding further dimensions of meaning to the others. The process has been an empirical one to the extent that our starting point for fleshing out these core concepts has been the actual behaviour of a particular group of decision-makers.

The continuing interplay between the group members' ideas of self and corporate direction has also reflected an interest in the relative utility in particular cases of bureaucratic and political models of organisational behaviour. Our findings for the group concerned show

that bureaucratic models and images of organisational structure and purpose are pervasive amongst the middle management participants. Earlier in this chapter we have referred to a distinction between categories of analysis that are solely accessible to analysts and those that also have currency for the subjects of analysis. We have found that although, for example, the full depth and implication of Weber's theories of bureaucracy are only available to analysts and not, commonly, to 'citizens', its essentials are nevertheless well accepted by many citizens.

In chapter 2 of this thesis, we argued that the semantic links between social data and derived commentary could be said to imply a gradually unfolding theoretical position for the observer. We also argued that such theory can be regarded as scientific to the degree that these links can be identified and explained. The particular medium of the case study has been employed for this purpose, incorporating as it does two distinct levels of language use - that of description and that of reflection upon what has been described.

The concepts or variables that we have chosen to focus upon have related more to the social processes of group decision-making than to any system or structure that could be said to contain those processes. Hence, our concern with Weberian bureaucracy has not had to do with

any formal, functional analysis of the machinery of Local Government within which the Housing Assessment Team is located. Rather, our interest has been with the ways in which the participants themselves have articulated and appeared to understand their own situation and its relationship with the organisation. We have attempted to develop and elaborate explanatory concepts that illuminate decision-making processes by understanding different aspects of the decision-makers' points of view.

This is in distinction to any kind of systems analysis or to any of the theory fitting procedures of the structuralist schools of Sociology. To pursue a geographical analogy, we have focused attention upon the river of process as it has flowed through the landscape of structure. We have not been concerned with the landscape qua landscape, juxtaposed against the path of the river. Rather, we have been intent upon the fluid dynamics of the river itself and, perforce, particular features of the landscape that have seemed to have affected the rate and direction of flow.

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